

HERMIONE,

OR THE

ORPHAN SISTERS.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM LANE,

AT THE

Minerva,

LEADENHALL-STREET.

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H. R. M. I. O. N. I.

OF THE

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LONDON:

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CHURCH

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Fran. Richards

HERMIONE

LETTER XIX.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 16.

OH my dear friend, my astonishment and joy are unspeakable. I had remained alone about half an hour, my mind distracted with a thousand thoughts, when I was roused from my reverie by hearing the great door below open; and condemning myself severely for a gratification so weak, dangerous, and improper, I hastily tried to compose my features, and rose to meet the company; when instead of the Heathcote family whom I had expected, Mr. Howard and my sister entered, attended—conceive my astonishment Sophia—by Roatsley himself.

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After

After disregarding your promise of waiting my return, Miss Seymour, cried he, probably you did not expect I should so soon make my appearance to reproach you: but though I believe I have some engagement or other with Bradshaw this evening, I found myself quite unable to withstand Mrs. Howard's kind and pressing invitation to sup here. The remembrance of the delightful evening I spent at Dover (which I shall ever regard as one of the happiest of my life) renders the temptation wholly irresistible.

His appearance did indeed agitate and surprise me beyond measure; nor could I conjecture how it had taken place, at such an hour and at a juncture so unexpected, till Fanny in a low voice contrived to inform me, that in pursuance of her projected plan of operations she had deferred leaving the theatre as long as with propriety she could, and indeed I suspect rather longer; for she owned all
the

the ladies were gone and only a few straggling gentlemen continued to saunter about. Captain Bradshaw, however, still kept by her side; and Roatsley returning, heard with evident marks of disappointment that I was already gone.

Perceiving my sister's unaccountable delay, he naturally concluded that her carriage was not arrived, and politely asked leave to see after it. Fanny, more and more embarrassed, now beheld the total defeat of all her secret schemes to avoid detection, and was at length obliged to confess that as the way was so *very short* and the night so *very pleasant* she thought walking by far the most agreeable way of returning; after which declaration wishing Roatsley a hasty good night, in hopes she should get rid of all the gentlemen, she quickly led the way, accompanied, added she in a tone of chagrin, by poor Mrs. Heathcote and the

five children, all wrapt up like so many Egyptian mummies.

Roatsley however, with a politeness natural to him, followed, and offering his arm, begged she would allow him the pleasure of escorting her part of the way. With great civility and a profusion of thanks, Mrs. Howard made violent resistance; but in vain; Roatsley made his point good, and had attended her as far as the bottom of the hill when they were met by Mr. Howard, who could do no less you know than request that he would walk forward and partake of a family supper at Hubert Hill. To this, after some hesitation, he consented; and the parson's family, having seen Fanny safe under her husband's protection, very opportunely chose to excuse themselves from accompanying her farther, and jumped one after another over the stile which leads through the fields to the parsonage.

You

You cannot easily conceive, Sophia, after the train of ideas which had preceded his appearance, how singular and extraordinary it now appeared, when I recollected what pique and displeasure his silence to Mr. Howard's letter had a few days before occasioned me. I could scarce believe he was now at Hubert Hill; and when I contrasted his present flow of spirits with his dejected aspect two hours before, every thing appeared mysterious and unaccountable.

Were my dear, dear Sophia now present, said I to myself more than once during the evening, she would confess that blind partiality has not guided my pen in my representation of this amiable young man.

When our repast was concluded, Mr. Howard and Fanny, charmed to perceive their guest to all appearance fully as much pleased with their company as they were delighted with his, both joined

in entreating him to accept of a bed here. To this some slight objections in regard to inconvenience were on his part made, and easily overruled by the good lady of the mansion, who proposed dispatching Dubois to the village with orders to his servants and an apology to Mr. Bradshaw; and in short he at length complied. The wine and fruits being placed on a small table before us, all ceremony and form seemed entirely discarded; and we chatted together with a social familiarity and cheerfulness, which a long series of occasional meetings in town could never have produced. We were all in uncommon spirits; and Fanny, in the giddiness of her mirth, let several little sallies of *naivete* escape her which seemed extremely to please and amuse her visitor. Chance has hitherto so contrived it, that my sister has seldom or never been much the object of Mr. Roatsley's attention; but he appeared this night to regard her
in

in a point of view wholly new, and entered with much relish into the natural simplicity of her character.

As yet, however, nothing had been hinted relating to the proposed explanation. Had Roatsley been *tete a tete* with any of the company, doubtless it would have been an easy matter to have led to the subject; but while the whole family were met together, to have enquired into particulars which from the agitation I had betrayed he could not but naturally conclude were of a very delicate nature, I doubt not must have appeared a presumption for which he could not summon resolution. Wholly unsuspecting besides how nearly he was himself interested in the tale, all he could possibly conjecture in regard to what he was to learn must have been, that in gratitude for the obligation he had procured me, I thought it incumbent he should be made acquainted with certain circumstances of

my situation which he had reason to apprehend might prove a painful and not improbably a mortifying communication.

Silent therefore he continued on this topick, tho' most amusing and agreeable on a thousand others, till my sister and I retired, which was not till after one in the morning, an hour unheard of in the sober annals of Hubert Hill.

I did not shut my eyes for many hours after I went to bed. The distant murmur of the two gentlemen's voices below, who did not separate till almost sunrise, engaged my constant attention; and a thousand conjectures and reflections relating to the subject of their conversation, entirely banished all inclination to rest till about my usual time of rising, which at this season is seldom after six. I then slept for a couple of hours; but finding it so late when I awoke, I hastily rose, and had but just finished dressing, when Mr. Howard tapped at my chamber door requesting

requesting me to follow him into my sister's dressing room.

Impatient beyond measure to learn the substance of last night's conversation, I flew rather than run into the room, where I found Fanny almost as eager as myself.

Mr. Howard then related circumstantially and minutely every word that had passed.

The moment we had left the parlour, Roatsley addressing himself to Mr. Howard, said—to you, my dear Sir, I think it must be wholly unnecessary to observe that to be but once in company with the amiable Mrs. Howard and her sister without feeling the warmest interest in their happiness and the most anxious solicitude to promote it to the utmost, is scarce possible; that I have experienced the truth of this remark, I hope you do me the justice to believe, and——

Your conduct, Sir, interrupted Mr. Howard (to whom I had hinted the task that was likely to devolve upon him) fully evinces the warmth of your benevolence, and claims the just gratitude of all this family.

Talk not of gratitude, I entreat, cried he. If through the interest of my family I have been so fortunate as to render a slight service to Miss Seymour, damp not the pleasure it gives me by attaching to it an idea of obligation it so little merits; or if (for you will find I am willing to make the very most of the favour) if I can flatter myself with having enjoyed the happiness either of obliging Miss Seymour, or on her account of having gratified *your* wishes, will you give me leave to point out to you how you may cancel the obligation at once and make me most sincerely regard myself as *your* debtor.

If I have the *power*, Mr. Roatsley, returned

turned Mr. Howard smiling, be assured the *will* is not wanting.

The power of granting my request, I must conclude you are in full possession of, since it is by permission of Miss Seymour I venture to make it; and allow me to premise, that without the sanction of *her* approbation and consent I certainly should not have had the presumption (however anxious) to demand particulars into which I have no title but from her indulgence and your's to penetrate. Will you however favour me so far as to inform me of such circumstances of her present and past situation, as may enable me to judge in what manner I may perhaps one day have it in my power really and essentially to serve.

If your present enquiry reaches only to pecuniary matters, Sir, returned Mr. Howard, I have the pleasure of assuring you that in regard to that circumstance, Miss Seymour's situation has never been
so

so extremely uncomfortable as I have reason to believe was suggested to you. My wife's fortune, and her sister's, amounted originally to twenty four thousand pounds; but the sudden death of their guardian, who had the sole management of this money, and who has left his affairs in the most embarrassed and involved situation, in all human probability will reduce the sum to one tenth of its value. This certainly is a reverse to be lamented; but the mind that is wholly untinged with avarice, seldom allows such mortifications to inflict a pang either deep or of long continuance, and I am certain it has never proved the source of more than a transient regret to either. Alas! human life is replete with distresses and anxieties which reach nearer to the heart, which pierce it in its tenderest feelings, and wound it where it is most open to the attack; and disappointments of this nature, against which both my wife and sister
have

have had to struggle at a very early period of life, have wholly blunted and obliterated the little rubs of adverse fortune.

I dare not venture to be inquisitive, said Roatsley, visibly affected by the picture drawn by Mr. Howard, yet will you call me so when I acknowledge that both my curiosity and compassion are strongly excited. Remember however in my justification, that Miss Seymour herself permitted the enquiry, and if I mistake not seemed astonished it was yet to be made.

You ought not to wonder at a circumstance so natural, said Mr. Howard. Miss Seymour's astonishment, great as it must have been, can scarce exceed mine to find that her *cousin*, the grandson of Lord Belmont, remains still uninformed of the natural ties that exist between them, especially after the unsuccessful application made to his Lordship through the medium

medium and interference of Lady Linrose for his countenance and favour.

At the expression "her cousin, the grandson of Lord Belmont," Roatsley caught suddenly the arm of Mr. Howard; and unable to interrupt him even by an ejaculation, remained rooted to the spot on which he stood in mute astonishment.

Good heavens! cried he, at length recovering himself—is it indeed possible that this amiable family, who so forcibly engaged my interest and attachment almost in the instant that accident presented them to my sight, should really prove the children of my late unfortunate uncle, and connected with me by the ties of blood as they have ever been by those of regard and admiration. Permit me, my dear Sir, continued he, approaching Mr. Howard with open arms, to congratulate myself on this delightful information, and pray give me leave to flatter myself with the hopes of one day procuring

curing an interest in the affections of my dear and valuable relations almost equal to what they have long possessed in mine.

Mr. Howard was not a little affected by this generous warmth, as apparent in his countenance and manner as in his language, and expressed his feelings on the occasion in strong terms.

But why has this explanation been made no sooner? cried Roatsley. Why have I continued so long in a painful and lingering uncertainty in regard to a family so respected and so beloved? distracted and confounded by the most unjust representations, dark suggestions, and at best vague and comfortless conjectures.

Who may have found either interest or pleasure in fabricating or in circulating injurious reports of your innocent and amiable cousins, said Mr. Howard, is not possible for me to conceive, neither will I lose a moment in attempting
to

to confute what must appear so wholly unwarrantable and unjust, that I shall leave it entirely to time and intimacy to prove it so in the fullest extent.

Unnecessary is the proof, cried Roastley with warmth, for false and malicious I have ever believed those reports to be. Yet you, my dear Sir, I am persuaded will be neither astonished nor offended, when I acknowledge that a multiplicity of disagreeable rumours continually reaching my ears to the disadvantage of those, of whom from the surer evidence of my senses I had the most amiable opinion, could not fail to shock and torment me; and if you can suppose a state in which you could just so far credit an aspersion as to allow it to teize and perplex you, without permitting it to influence your judgment, paradoxical as that state may seem it is exactly the situation under which my mind has for some time past laboured.

Far

Far from being surprized, returned Mr. Howard with his usual candour, I think I should only have been so had you continued immovable and determined in your first prepossessions, when such infinite trouble and attention have been bestowed to warp your judgment and mislead your sentiments.

But my mother, you say, was in the secret. Pray how came *she* to be informed, while I and the rest of the family remained wholly ignorant and unsuspecting that my fair cousins had ever dreamt of quitting the secluded spot where they received their education.

That any individual of Lord Belmont's family should continue uninformed of any step taken by the ladies since their father's death, was by no means either their intention or mine. To their relations no secrecy was requisite; and in regard to others, a temporary concealment was merely thought necessary, because

cause it offered an easy method for escaping the impertinence of curiosity and investigation ; and they naturally deferred relinquishing the name by which they had always hitherto been known, till the sanction and countenance of Lord Belmont should enable them to support the cruel retrospections which they knew their father's memory must sustain on their introduction into the world. An utter and absolute rejection from his Lordship to their application for acknowledgment, soon pointed out the fortunate propriety and delicacy of this precaution, as they afterwards disdained all thoughts of assuming or proclaiming their title to a name, of which their family, however unjustly, deemed them unworthy.

You open a transaction so entirely new, wonderful, and inconceivable, cried Mr. Roatsley, who had been attending with an expression of amazement in his countenance to this speech of Mr. Howard's, that

that I can no otherwise hope to reduce it to my comprehension than by entreating you to favour me with a minute and regular detail of every circumstance.

Mr. Howard then beginning at the unhappy epocha of my dear father's misfortunes, related briefly yet with precision every particular respecting him and his children till the period of our arrival in England.

In regard to many of these events, said Mr. Howard while he repeated to us this interesting conversation, I could not suppose Mr. Roatsley compleatly ignorant. It may be naturally inferred that those who could traduce the innocent offspring would not fail to load the parent's memory with additional reproach, and I doubt not but Mr. Roatsley's mind has been early tinctured with the most contumacious prejudices against his ill-fated uncle. To know his errors, independent of the penitence and remorse
which

which so powerfully extenuated and even obliterated his guilt, could not but mislead the nephew's candour, and must have induced him to regard with unabated horror a conduct that was followed by consequences so unhappy as to banish him for ever from his friends and country.

I therefore dwelt with particular energy on the dismal lapse of years spent in sorrowful seclusion that had succeeded to your father's rupture with his family, and continued invariably till his death: his contrition, his sufferings, his rectitude and benevolence, and the assiduous care with which he incessantly laboured (and in which he so well succeeded) to instil into the minds of his children every virtuous and amiable sentiment, as a barrier against the temptations and vicissitudes of a world that from a too fatal experience he believed strewed with dangers and replete with misery: and in order

der to enforce this relation, I promised to procure him a perusal of the manuscript written by your father's own hand, which, as he seeks not in it either to palliate or conceal his faults, but breathes in every line that horror which ever attended the sense of his offences, offers a defence, the force of which candour must admit and justice itself acknowledge.

As Mr. Roatsley did not attempt to interrupt Mr Howard, he proceeded to acquaint him with our arrival in town, our disappointment in regard to Mr. Bensley's decease, our application in this uncomfortable and friendless situation to Lord Belmont through the medium of Lady Linrose, and with every particular of the interview on that subject with her Ladyship.

He next recapitulated the substance of my letter to my grandfather, imploring his favour and protection ; and in answer to this, said he, taking out of his pocket
book

book the epistle written him on that occasion, pray take the trouble of reading his Lordship's final determination from the pen of Lady Linrose.

During the latter part of this relation, Mr. Roatsley's countenance betrayed an agitation and astonishment that gave defiance, Mr. Howard said, to all powers of expression. His perplexity, after reading the letter, seemed but little abated. He was for some moments lost in thought; but at length breaking silence—all that I can possibly conceive, cried he, all that it is in my power to conjecture or comprehend in this affair, is, that my mother having been herself deceived by the injurious aspersions fabricated by the infamous woman Brumpton, which have been circulated in town with a credit that astonishes me, dreading the impetuosity of my temper, which might induce me to disoblige Lord Belmont and even to act in open defiance of a prohibition so unjust,

unjust, so inhuman, so wholly contrary to his natural character and benevolence, in consequence of her apprehension of creating that discordant dissention which ever leads to alienation of affection and often to a total breach of family unanimity, has determined on concealing carefully from my knowledge every circumstance of the application; yet I must acknowledge myself extremely displeased at a step, which has been the means of retaining me so long in uneasiness and uncertainty, and the more I consider the circumstances of the whole transaction, the more I am astonished and bewildered. To imagine that Lord Belmont, if properly apprized of the situation of his granddaughters, would allow an obstinate and hardened prejudice to arrest his justice, to influence his humanity, and even to banish natural affection from his bosom, is a supposition to which I cannot for an instant give credit; it is to believe

believe him scarce human, and devoid of the first and most powerful principle of our moral construction. My mother indeed labours under a cruel misrepresentation, to which she has unfortunately given implicit faith, and which it has never been in my power to confute; for more than once have the Miss Seymours, though their names and some vague reports concerning them were all I concluded she knew, been the subject of discussion and even of altercation between us. Violently prepossessed against them previous to their application, her accounts may have perhaps influenced Lord Belmont's determination, even without her intending or dreading the injustice which her representation of their characters may have occasioned.

This indeed in some measure accounts for her Ladyship's conduct, and even greatly exculpates her from the charge of selfish and interested views. While she regarded

garded us in the light of relations who were likely to reflect dishonour upon our family, and who could bring no consolation to the desolated bosom of our grandfather, it cannot be supposed that her mediation in our favour would prove fervent, nor that her anxiety for our success could be as sincere as if our conduct had supported our claims. Her cold reception of Mr. Howard, and her distant reserve to myself, are here fully explained; and while the motives of her Ladyship's conduct are cleared up, a distant hope opens to view, that her prejudices being removed, those of our only surviving parent may yet listen to truth and yield to the voice of nature.

Is it not surprizing, however, that the infamous designs of this wretch Brumpton in aspersing our reputations, should have so extensively spread the slander as to reach the ears of a person who moves in a sphere so superior, so distinct

from that wicked woman's line of life, and that these calumnies should have flown with such rapidity; for Lady Linrose must have learnt that we were unworthy of her notice almost as soon as she was informed that we solicited it. Mr. Howard's letter indeed, she received before her departure from her country seat, had afforded her an opportunity of being made acquainted with any particulars; but during the short interval between her arrival in town and her conference with Mr. Howard, our busy enemies must have contrived to sow the seeds of that contagious distrust and disgust, which then proceeded to infect and influence Lord Belmont.

This conversation having detained the two gentlemen till extremely late, they then separated and went to rest; though not before Roatsley had reminded Mr. Howard of his promise to intercede with my sister and myself to procure him a
perusal

perusal of the manuscript to which in his narration he had so often alluded.

So pleased, so affected was I with this relation, that it was with difficulty I could restrain my too visible emotion; and I willingly gave into Mr. Howard's hands the dismal packet, the mere sight of which as it lies in my bureau often saddens my gayest moments.

Mr. Roatsley has been up some time, said Mr. Howard; and anxious to present himself to you as a near and tender relation, has waited the hour of your rising with all the impatience of a dear and long absent friend.

Mr. Howard and my sister then went to join him in the breakfasting parlour; but afraid to discover an agitation too poignant for the occasion, interesting as it was, I chose to remain a few moments behind in hopes of acquiring some degree of composure.

The instant my sister appeared, Roats-

ley with open arms and a countenance in the highest degree expressive of kindness and delight, approached her. Mr. Howard, cried he, are not cousins blest with peculiar privileges, and folding her in his arms, he embraced her with the tenderness and familiarity of a brother.

So our cousin does not desert us, cried Fanny, receiving his salute with equal ease and pleasure.

Good heavens, my dear Mrs. Howard, I hope you do not confess ever having for a moment harboured a suspicion at once so unnatural and injurious.

Just then I entered; and quitting my sister's hand, he hastened to seize mine, which he kissed very fervently more than once, though with a degree of embarrassment, and even of distance, yes even of distance Sophia, which did not in the least influence his address to Mrs. Howard.

A variety of sensations, a conflict of emotions,

emotions, in defiance of all my summoned calmness and resolution, wholly deprived me of utterance. Will you not acknowledge me, my dearest cousin, cried he. At these words, you will blush for my weakness Sophia—(I'm sure I do most painfully at this moment, even at the recollection of my folly)—I burst into tears, and hastily pulling away my hand, turned from him in silence and ran out of the parlour.

A moment's reflexion shewed me what an unaccountable appearance my behaviour must have had to all present. Without allowing myself therefore an instant for hesitation lest my spirit should evaporate, I wiped my eyes and forced myself to return.

I blush for myself, said I on re-entering the parlour; and my cheeks sufficiently proved how true was the confession; but as I have never before enjoyed the happiness of knowing but one male

C 3 relation,

relation, it is no wonder that the acknowledged presence of another should bring the first so forcibly to my memory as wholly to overcome my feelings.

In sheltering my weakness under this little artifice, I was hardly guilty of deceit; for though my tears did not at that instant owe their source to this cause, the very idea had during the night drawn showers from my eyes; and I could not help believing, that if our beloved father looked down upon his children, he must witness with pleasure, even in his angelic state, this re-union with his family.

Mr. Roatsley only replied by pressing my hand tenderly in silence; and perceiving the subject as yet too affecting for my spirits, he forbore dwelling on it, and shifted the conversation to topics less interesting. My heart was indeed so completely awakened to softness and sensibility, that the keenness of my feelings gave even to my glad emotions the
tincture

tincture of melancholy; and while the most heartfelt satisfaction lightened my countenance, a tear, which all my efforts could hardly dispense, was ready to follow every smile.

Of our breakfast conversation I can really give you no account. Indeed I believe it is conferring an unmerited compliment on what passed to dignify it with the name of conversation. A hundred different topics were occasionally touched upon; but not one pursued with any method or connexion. Fanny's mirth was giddy and unbounded; Roastley himself appeared in uncommon spirits; and though I perhaps was not the most talkative of the company, I believe my silent satisfaction was so apparent that I was far from appearing the least pleased.

Soon after breakfast he took leave of us in the kindest manner. I am unfortunately engaged, cried he in answer to the pressing invitations of my sister and

relation, it is no wonder that the acknowledged presence of another should bring the first so forcibly to my memory as wholly to overcome my feelings.

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Mr. Howard, otherwise undoubtedly I should not have been proof against the friendly and obliging request of my new found relations, but while I remain in the county, which I think of doing for some time, I flatter myself you will allow me often to be your guest.

He then departed, followed by Mr. Howard; who having some business in the village, accompanied him on horse-back part of the way.

Fanny and I, left then to ourselves, talked over every circumstance of the transactions of last night. We made a thousand reflexions, you may believe, upon the singularity of our situation, and formed various conjectures upon the conduct of Lady Linrose and the unaccountable silence and secrecy she has observed; which we could not avoid attributing in part to selfish motives.

My sister dwelt with pleasure on the tenderness of her cousin's behaviour on their first meeting. Had I never seen him
till

till now, said she, the warmth of feeling with which he acknowledged a connexion so repugnant to the wishes of his family must instantly have gained my heart. On approaching you, I observed he was more distant; and I confess the difference struck me obviously. His address to me was that of a kind and long absent relation, who expressed in that character, with affection and familiarity, the pleasure he felt at the rencontre; to you his behaviour seemed to betray more of the timidity of the lover than the undisguised kindness of the friend.

O certainly it resembled the timidity of a lover extremely, cried I in an ironical tone, and I am afraid rather peevishly, for Fanny burst into a loud laugh.

Nay, cried she, I really think you have some reason to be jealous; for it must be confessed I am grown a prodigious favourite since last night, and before, you know, he used to be so en-

tirely engaged in another quarter, that he never could give himself the trouble to speak nor to listen to me, and seldom seemed even conscious I was in the same room with him.

She was diverting herself at my expence, when Mr. Howard returned. Pray Fanny, cried he, what is it that amuses you?

Nay I dare not tell for my ears, returned she, for Hermione will beat me; but smiling expressively, she sung these two lines from the entertainment of Midas:

My sister, he kifs'd her, but me he pass'd by,
I'm jealous of the fellow's bad taste and blind eye.

She needed not have stopped there, for words could not have contrived to explain more clearly what she pretended to conceal, and Mr. Howard's countenance expressed a momentary smile, but as if he was desirous of relieving my embarrassment,

rassment; which was indeed extreme, he instantly entered on a new subject, tho' the rapidity with which he did so, by confirming my apprehensions of suspicion, gave me very severe mortification.

He soon after began to join warmly with my sister in praise of our cousin's amiable qualities; and with an enthusiasm which delighted me, though I hardly ventured to appear attentive, recapitulated the conversation he had had with him during their ride. Though we have suffered so unaccountably from the breath of fame, said he, it has at least rendered us justice to this young man, whose character rises upon me every opportunity I enjoy of conversing with him. I have just been receiving some farther lights in regard to the ignorance in which he has continued thus long, and which appeared so extraordinary after the information given us in Mrs. Hindon's letter; but he has just now told me that during the conversation

conversation he had with my sister in law that evening at her house, she touched so lightly on particulars, supposing him already perfectly informed of the most material circumstances, that not a hint escaped her which could have led him to discover his connexion with you. All I learnt from her was, said he, that the two ladies had been unfortunate, were involved in consequent difficulties, and that an application to Lord Belmont (I concluded for his interest towards obtaining a pension) had proved unsuccessful. My anxiety could not fail to be strongly excited: yet as the opportunity in a large company was unfavourable for entering more fully on the subject, I intended, for farther information, to apply next day to Mrs. Hindon, when I hoped to find her disengaged and at liberty to satisfy me; and in the mean while I determined to enquire of my mother what she knew of the affair, as I understood from
some

some words dropped by Mrs. Hindon, that she had interested herself in the application. I seized the earliest moment I could lay hold of to mention the matter to her, and next morning at breakfast asked her if she had ever been told that two young ladies of the name of Seymour, ladies whose names she had often heard me repeat with every expression of admiration, had besought my grandfather's interest towards procuring them an annuity from government. My mother's answer I perfectly recollect. She told me she believed such a demand had been made by the ladies in question, but that disadvantageous reports circulated against them had arrested his Lordship's intended exertions in their behalf, nor could he think of applying publicly in favour of girls, whose conduct by all accounts would reflect but discredit upon those who interested themselves in their affairs.

It

It was in vain, continued Mr. Roatsley, that I combated these unjust imputations with all the arguments in my power, and appealed to your character (as their guardian) so fully established in the eyes of all favoured with your acquaintance. My mother coolly answered, that men even of the strictest probity were not likely to withdraw their protection on account even of the most flagrant improprieties of conduct in young girls committed to their charge, and that it was more than probable they had even imposed on you with a borrowed appearance of that merit which art could easily assume and beauty sufficiently enforce. This, she said upon second thoughts, seemed indisputably the case, since a single evening spent accidentally in their company had rendered me so warmly their friend, and had induced me so romantically to espouse their cause, though totally uninformed of their characters and connexions.

connexions. They were unknown in this country, even by my own account; (for I had mentioned that circumstance as a motive of compassion) their fame was dubious at best: and such misconduct had been laid to their charge, that even this phrase was a charitable one.

I warmly demanded from whom this slanderous intelligence had been received, and was at length unwillingly informed, that the woman with whom you lodged when in town had acknowledged to my mother's maid that the connexion between the ladies and their guardian was much too intimate for the distance required between a gentleman of character and his wards.

Shocked and confounded, though perfectly satisfied of the infamous falshood of this scandalous aspersi^on, I was determined to have the matter fully explained, and instantly went to the woman's house, where having entered into conversation
with

with her I enquired particularly about her late guests. Her answers were ambiguous and evasive: and I soon perceived the character of the landlady was such as must render all information from that quarter false and injurious. I therefore soon quitted her, first reprimanding her for the infamous aspersions she had expressed, and assuring her that the ladies possessed friends who would loudly confute and rigorously punish those who might utter them. I returned home furnished as I imagined with proofs and arguments more than sufficient to overthrow the most determined prejudices. But my mother would hardly allow me to enter on the subject; and telling me neither herself nor I had any interest in the behaviour of two girls who were unknown to her even by sight, and she was afraid fully as unknown to me by character, although the acquaintance of a few hours had enabled me to judge so perfectly of their
their

their dispositions, positively declared she should on no account be prevailed with to intercede with Lord Belmont in their behalf. I now perceive her motive, concluded Mr. Roatsley, for retaining me in ignorance. Prejudiced herself against my cousins before she was informed of their real name and situation, she was unwilling to strengthen a prepossession which might lead me to act contrary to the commands of Lord Belmont, whose will in matters of the most trifling moment has ever been regarded as a law in our family, and who it seems has positively forbidden the protection or countenance of my mother to be extended to these amiable relations. Indeed she might well dread the impetuosity of my temper on such an occasion would but ill brook the constraint of a prohibition so unnatural, and well might she know that no Lord Belmont on earth would have prevailed with me to

to join in a measure, which reason and humanity must condemn, and the most inflexible prejudice only could adopt.

I shall not comment on this conversation, Sophia. It speaks for itself. Adieu my love. My packet is immense, but I rest assured you do not complain of its length. I direct it to Avignon, as you desired me in your last; from which place I expect soon to receive a long volume of your journal.

N. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XX.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JUNE 17.

YESTERDAY I walked out as usual in the morning, intending to strole through

through the wood, attended by one of the parson's little girls, of whom my sister is extremely fond, and who often finds her way up the hill and spends the day with us. She is a delightful child of five years old, with a countenance animated and blooming as the spring; her flaxen hair curls round her face in ringlets so picturesque, that I imagined she would be an admirable subject for my pencil, and have accordingly drawn her in crayons, careſſing a favourite little dog who always accompanies her in her viſits. The portrait has ſurpaſſed my hopes; for I have ſucceeded tolerably well, both in the reſemblance and attitude, and it makes a very ornamental piece of furniture for the drawing room. Since that period, the child had been continually teizing me to draw a little picture as a preſent for her doll; and as children, when they have got a whim in their heads, are unceaſing in their importunities.

tunities, she persecuted me during our walk to set down to work on a sheet of paper which she had brought in her hand from the house for that purpose.

The scene here is romantic beyond imagination. The river, that murmurs below at the foot of a gentle descent, is shaded by the most venerable oaks, which sometimes form a thicket wild and sequestered, and in other places admit views of a most fertile and beautiful country; which being embellished with the plantations surrounding the splendid seats of several gentlemen of the county at a distance, and ornamented with a nearer sight of the spire belonging to the parish church, exhibits a prospect of gaiety as well as grandeur. A walk that is cut in the slope of the bank, is my favourite resort, and so well calculated for soothing into a languor not unpleasant, any oppression which rests upon the mind, that I found it peculiarly suited.

suiting to the present state of my spirits; and to rid myself of Charlotte's importunities, I at length sat down on one of the green seats, and pulling out a pencil began to trace a little rough sketch which soon satisfied the child, who employed herself in running about gathering nosegays from the wood flowers that adorned the banks of the river.

Having the pencil in my hand, I began almost unconsciously to delineate upon the cover of a letter, features so deeply engraven on my mind, that I required not the presence of the original to enable me to recollect every trait of expression with accuracy; and a few strokes, though incorrect and unfinished, soon exhibited a resemblance, to which, innumerable as have been my secret attempts on the same subject, I had never before attained.

Charmed with my success, I gazed with delight on the drawing which promised

mised to be the private companion of many a solitary hour; and so wholly absorbed was I in contemplating my performance, that I heard not the sound of steps that approached me, till a voice almost at my ear said—I hope I don't disturb your meditations, Miss Seymour: and suddenly looking up, I beheld Roatsley immediately behind me.

Conscious apprehension made me instantly start up in confusion; and the paper dropping from my hand, a light breeze which just then seemed to rise for the purpose of plunging me into difficulties, got hold of it, and quickly conveyed it down the slope of the bank below.

Uncertain whether he had a glimpse of it or not, and unable to recover myself sufficiently to affect unconcern, I uttered not a word, but followed the flying cover with my eyes, in which anxiety and embarrassment were so strongly painted,

painted, that Roatsley instantly added—
what a world of mischief have I been
guilty of, and directly flew to recover it.

For heaven's sake, exclaimed I in
absolute agonies, for heaven's sake don't
think about it. It is not of the slightest
importance; it is a trifle, a drawing, not
worth the trouble of picking up; and
catching hold of his arm, (for I knew
not what I was doing) just as he had
arrived at the spot where a bush ob-
structed its progress—For God's sake
come away, repeated I with a vehemence
the most ill judged and absurd, and so
far beyond what the occasion could pos-
sibly require without the interest of some
secret cause, that no wonder he stood
with his eyes fixed upon me in mute
astonishment. The look of perplexity
and surprise with which he regarded me
instantly discovered to me my foolish
imprudence in giving way to an alarm
that had in fact no real foundation, and
from

from which a small degree of self command and presence of mind might have relieved me. I then heartily repented my folly; but alas! it was too late, and I only discovered my unfortunate absurdity time enough to lament its effects.

We were both silent for a few moments. At length—I cannot think any thing a trifle, said he, with a flush on his countenance, that gives Miss Seymour such visible uneasiness; especially—a drawing too—added he hesitating. The subject of her solitary contemplation. Allow me at least, Madam, to restore to you what appears of such infinite value; and darting forward, he caught the paper in his hand.

Sir, cried I, with a spirit which the present exigency alone could have inspired, and with all the firmness my terror gave me courage to assume, only hear me: if you cast one look on that paper,
never

never will I pardon, never will I see you more.

This speech certainly was frantic in the highest degree. It was acknowledging the truth of his hint; it was allowing him to conclude that the drawing was the resemblance of some person dear to my heart, since my agitation appeared so uncontrollable; but my imprudent uneasiness from the beginning must I imagined have infused these suspicions by this time strongly into his mind; and shocked to the soul at the apprehension of my heart being thus laid open in a manner so mortifying, so dreadful, to the man on earth from whom I most wished its weakness concealed, this sudden prohibition struck me as the only possible means of preventing immediate detection.

He still held the paper in his hand, and would not be prevailed with to restore it; but he made no attempt to exa-

mine it. I dare not risk your displeasure, cried he, with a countenance expressive of uneasiness and suspense. To be banished from your sight, and the object of your hate, are ideas too horrible, too insupportable to be thought of; yet are they almost the only punishments that could at this instant so forcibly operate on my mind as to arrest my impatience and deter me from satisfying my burning curiosity.

Give me the paper, cried I; it belongs to me—it is mine——

And is dear to you, interrupted he with a voice almost suffocated, and holding it above my reach: say that it is dear to you, and I will indeed fly your sight for ever.

No, cried I, 'tis nobody—'tis nothing—it is not of the least consequence—only give it me, or I never will forgive you.

Little Charlotte perceiving this altercation,

tercation, just then came running up to us. Is it the pretty gentleman's picture, cried she, for I had been imprudent enough to allow her to look over me while I was roughly sketching it.

A gentleman's picture, repeated Roatsley. Yes that it must be, and the resemblance of the most blest, the most envied of mankind.

No, cried I, with an imprudence which I shall deplore to my latest hour but of which my exhausted spirits made me unconsciously guilty, I almost hate him at this instant, and (oh! Sophia, you will blush the deepest crimson for me) I burst into tears.

These words, and the manner, the warmth with which they were pronounced, alas! too plainly discovered the fatal secret. Scarce had they escaped my lips, when their too obvious meaning was apparent to myself. My feelings were then unutterable, but con-

scious that my folly could not be recalled, I saw no consolation but in flight, and turning away with all the expedition in my power, I was flying down the bank towards the Chinese bridge, when Roatsley, too violently agitated to perceive the presence of the child, suddenly seizing my hand, prevented me by throwing himself at my feet. Miss Seymour, cried he, with an energy which must have surmounted all opposition had resistance been in my power—lovely and adored Miss Seymour, stay but for an instant. That secret passion which has proved the torment of my life so long, how shall I stifle or conceal in a moment like this? how shall I suppress the perhaps too fatal presumption to which it gives birth! For the sake of heaven, allow me either to put an interpretation on your present agitation, which will overwhelm me with a transport almost too infinite to be supported, or at once,
by

by withdrawing your prohibition, dash my delusive hopes and punish my aspiring folly as it deserves;

Oh ! Sophia, what were my sensations at this speech. I tried in vain to disengage my hand; and having at length effected it, I covered my face with both, and almost sunk upon the ground. Roatsley, alarmed at my situation, hastily arose, and obliging me to lean on his arm, supported me almost fainting to a bench that encircled the trunk of an ancient sycamore not far distant.

Weakness for a few moments suspended shame, but soon my strength returning, my confusion redoubled with a violence unspeakable. During this short interval we were both silent, and Roatsley alternately kissed the hand he held in his and the drawing which he had now ventured to examine, and which he regarded as the assured pledge of my affection. Oh ! my Sophia, feel for your

D 3

friend

friend at this moment of emotion. Conceive if you can my sensations. But indeed that is wholly impossible. I was overwhelmed with shame, covered with blushes, and my pride most painfully wounded: the severity of the mortification I endured made me wish that I could sink into the ground and for ever conceal myself from the eyes of Roatsley, who gazed on me with a delight chastened by a degree of diffidence that seemed to aim at reconciling me to myself.

Pardon me, loveliest of women, cried he the moment he saw me beginning to recover, which I no sooner did than I attempted to rise—pardon the man who adores you—who would sacrifice his life, his happiness, for your's.

Just as he pronounced these words with the most passionate warmth, little Charlotte, who had been present during the whole of this distressing scene, a circumstance

cumstance which our mutual agitation had prevented our discovering, came running forward, and surprising him upon his knees, stared at the singularity of his attitude with a look of curiosity and surprise that quickly restored both his recollection and mine.

Roatsley started from the posture from which I had before repeatedly entreated him to rise without effect, and instantly getting up to leave him, I declared that on no account I could remain longer; and unable to meet his eyes, quickened my steps towards the house.

Stay but for a few moments, said he in a low voice, but in the most earnest manner; leave me not in this agonizing suspense I beseech you.

My confusion and perplexity having somewhat subsided, my heart began to taste the felicity of knowing (distressing as had been the circumstances to which I owed the discovery) that what I felt I had

not been incapable of inspiring; but at this moment the recollection of Lady Elizabeth and his engagements rushing upon my mind, shame, resentment, and anguish, all at once assailed me; and recalling with bitter regret the weakness I had betrayed and the professions which compassion perhaps alone had extorted, I pulled away the hand that Roatsley had again seized, and hastily said—you have egregiously deceived yourself Sir, and I own I am justly to blame in having partly given cause for the deception; but I desire you will leave me, and allow me to return instantly home. I shall be seriously displeased if you persist in detaining me; and having slightly curtsied to him, though without venturing to regard him, I redoubled my pace and arrived at the house, not having once looked back.

On entering the hall, my sister ran to me. Hermione, cried she, what have you

you done with yourself all the morning. I have been sending to the hut and all over the wood to find you : for pray who do you think is about to honour us with a visit, but our condescending Right Honourable relation, Lady Linrose.

Lady Linrose! repeated I in amazement.

Yes, her servant has been here with a card informing us that her Ladyship is on the road to wait on us, and entreats the favour of being allowed to see us one half hour in private.

Just as she spoke a carriage and four drove up to the door; and scarce had we gained the parlour, when Lady Linrose herself entered it.

She approached us with a look of the most engaging and affectionate familiarity. I may well dread the reception I ought to meet with, said she, taking a hand of each; but if the countenance is to be trusted, I will venture to hope

that a behaviour which I have been unwillingly constrained hitherto to support will not, when its motives are candidly examined, utterly exclude me from the prospect of obtaining your friendship.

Confounded by an address so unexpected, we bowed in silence; and my sister leading to the sofa we all seated ourselves.

I am now venturing on a step, resumed her Ladyship, which I have long ardently wished it in my power to pursue, but which even at this moment is so dangerous and daring, that the exigency of the present occasion, and a due regard to my own character only, can excuse or palliate my imprudence. I have long most anxiously desired the opportunity of a moment like this, in which I could fairly and candidly lay before you the motives of a conduct which must doubtless have appeared to you harsh, cruel, and unfeeling. Alas! you knew
not,

not, that while duty withheld from you the protection to which you so justly laid claim, slander and injustice united to render the prohibition on my part easy to fulfil. Lately, but very lately, was I made acquainted with the value of what, by the commands of a parent, I am deprived of enjoying—your friendship and society. No sooner however was the veil taken from my eyes, than my mind became uneasy till it had acknowledged its injurious prejudices; and some alarming circumstances, to which I must entreat one quarter of an hour's attention, have at length determined me to hazard the danger of Lord Belmont's displeasure, should this act of disobedience reach his ears, rather than continue to appear in a light so injurious to my heart, so contrary to my real feelings.

Having received a bow of acknowledgment from my sister, and an assurance
from

from me that the present apology entirely obliterated all recollection of what once perhaps we might have considered as unkind, her Ladyship proceeded.

I must in the first place sincerely acknowledge, continued she, that I have no adequate apology to offer for having given credit to aspersions which I have since found so perfectly ill founded and unjust; but perhaps you may be kind enough to admit some sort of palliation from the utter ignorance in which I had been retained respecting you. That I had such relations, was merely all I knew; and no sooner had I received Mr. Howard's letter, than I determined in my own mind to afford you all the civility, kindness, and attention, to which your youth, sex, and situation in a quarter of the world entirely new, justly entitled you, especially as it was not difficult for me to perceive you were the same agreeable party which my son had
encoun-

encountered on his journey, with whom he had been so much charmed and in whose favour he had so much prepossessioned me. Had he been with me at the moment of my receiving the letter, I should undoubtedly have instantly yielded to the warmth of my compassion, and entrusted him, however imprudently, with the secret of your birth and connexion; but indispensable business had hurried him from me almost immediately upon his arrival, and time being given me for consideration, I foresaw how precarious and perplexing was the part I had now to act. Lord Belmont's character was well known to me. Though rigid in principle and fervent in benevolence, his prejudices are rooted and immovable; and a prepossession once fixed in his mind, allows neither reason nor humanity to interfere towards its extirpation. What steps he might pursue were doubtful; and my fears greatly overbalanced my

my hopes as to the generosity of his conduct. These reflections, though combated by my secret wishes, determined me to stand aloof till his Lordship's resolution was known; and if possible, by guarding the secret carefully from my family and more especially from my son, whose warmth of feelings and impetuosity I particularly dreaded, to preserve them from the wrathful effects of a displeasure from which I myself have suffered too severely not to apprehend it with terror.

I intended to hasten to town; but some previous business of real moment deferred my journey for some little time, and an alarming complaint, but of short duration, confined me so closely for a few days after my arrival, that I had no opportunity for transacting the business that had occasioned my removal, and which from the necessity of preserving it a profound secret I was unable to manage

nage by an agent. During this interval, anxious to get information through every possible means of the situation of my young relations, in regard to whom I felt myself extremely solicitous, it may be easily conjectured that I attempted every channel of intelligence, and made enquiry of every person whom friendship or intimacy allowed to visit me during my confinement. I was constrained to mention you however merely as agreeable, accidental acquaintances, whom my son had represented to me in an engaging and favourable point of view, and your very names were unknown to all to whom I applied, my son's friend Mr. Bradshaw excepted; who informed me that he had the honour of residing under the same roof with you, but whose light and disrespectful manner of expressing himself shocked and confounded me. The particulars which I contrived to draw from him, though vague and void of proof,
I must

I must acknowledge infused a portion of doubt and distrust into my mind; but when I take the liberty of repeating what he said, I hope you will in some measure excuse and forgive me.

Your personal charms alone, he told me, were known to him; for to your private characters he was a stranger, tho' if appearances were to be trusted, the latter by no means conferred any additional lustre on the former: he some time afterwards added, that he had been informed at all hands you were light, doubtful, and indiscreet; your principal, if not your almost only associate, being a woman of infamous character, at whose windows he himself had frequently beheld you. Though I was thunderstruck at this intelligence, I did not give it implicit credit, but contrived to dispatch my own maid, who has been long and deservedly in my confidence, with orders to make private enquiries respecting

respecting your conduct of the people with whom you lodged. Their accounts, ambiguous and perplexing, served only to strengthen and confirm my error.

Here I could not resist making an attempt to interrupt Lady Linrose, with the design of explaining the various and singular causes of these shocking imputations: but perceiving my intention—hold, my dear Madam, said she warmly. Do me not the injustice to imagine I now require any particulars to convince me of your innocence, and of my own inconsiderate conclusions. 'Tis *my* vindication not your's that brought me hither; and if any doubt could have remained on my mind, after having been once in your company, my son's explanation must have wholly removed it. I have already engaged your attention too long: yet I must request the indulgence of a few moments longer.

Such was the situation of affairs, when
I be-

I besought the favour of a visit from Mr. Howard; and in spite of the ill opinion I had imbibed of his wards, I wrote to Lord Belmont in their behalf with all the warmth they could have desired; though to own the truth, the longer I reflected the more was I convinced that the success of the application would be such as it proved. The event justified my prudence in having concealed the matter from my son; his Lordship, amongst other injunctions, having strongly enjoined a continuation of secrecy. There is a certain portion of spirit in my grandson's character, said he in his letter, which leads me to dread his conduct on this occasion. While I admire and approve of a disposition that is the source in general of noble and generous actions, in the present instance I fear the effects of its enthusiasm, which may induce him to regard those unfortunate relations as objects of peculiar interest and regard.

regard. I solemnly declare however that his interference in this point with my commands, shall for ever exclude him my favour and cast him from my heart for ever.

Some time afterwards, my son one day unexpectedly demanded if I had ever been made acquainted with an application to Lord Belmont from those ladies of the name of Seymour against whom I seemed to have taken a prepossession so unaccountable? I evaded the question; and, though not without difficulty, soon after waved the subject: for while his expressions shewed me that he knew but half the secret, his warmth convinced me his knowledge of the whole would prove destructive of that unanimity and affection which has ever subsisted between him and his grandfather.

Such being my private sentiments of you, and such my situation with my son, you may easily conceive what my astonishment

nishment must have been on finding myself unexpectedly introduced to you at Holtenham Abbey. Your countenance, your manner, and the ingenuous innocence which shone conspicuous in both, opened my eyes, and unavoidably engaged my regard and admiration. Yet withheld from acknowledging myself to you in the manner I wished, I was unwillingly constrained to assume the distance of a stranger; and I will candidly own, that as such I must have still continued, had not the present unhappy dissention between my favourite son and myself obliged me to lay before you the private motives of my conduct—motives which I own only can excuse it.

Her Ladyship was visibly affected at these words; but having wiped her eyes, continued—Mr. Roatsley, I find, has been informed, I suppose by this family, of the whole affair; and displeased with the part which prudence persuaded me to

to perform, last night desired from me an explanation of every particular. Finding all further secrecy impracticable, I readily and candidly acknowledged the truth; but this, instead of satisfying and convincing him, served merely to heighten a resentment that barely preserved the respect which duty and affection has never yet allowed him to forget towards his mother. Shocked to the soul by this difference, the first that from the moment of his birth ever occurred between us, I determined to open my heart to *you*; from the flattering hope, that knowing the secret spring of every part of my conduct, *you* might be enabled to do justice to my motives; and I trust should the subject ever again recur when my son visits you, you will have the goodness and generosity to convince him that in such circumstances, where the inflexible displeasure of Lord Belmont

was

was at stake, it was the indispensable duty of a parent to act as I did.

My sister and I in warm terms returned her Ladyship thanks for this candid and ingenuous explanation, which we sincerely assured her entirely satisfied us as to every point of her behaviour. As matters stood, Sophia, it was undoubtedly both prudent and natural for Lady Linrose to conduct herself in the manner she has done, and I now reflect with pain on the injurious opinion that chagrin and disappointment induced us to entertain of a character which this one conversation developes in the most amiable and honourable point of view.

We expressed much uneasiness at the difference which Mr. Roatsley's compassionate humanity, in espousing so warmly our cause, had occasioned with a parent to whose foresight and maternal attentions he owed so much, and hoped it had proceeded no disagreeable lengths.

My

My son, said her Ladyship, is possessed of the most amiable disposition in the world. The conversation I have just now mentioned, passed between us last night, when he asked permission to attend me in my dressing room after supper. I had observed that he was grave and uneasy the whole day; but no opportunity for an explanation had till then occurred. Though gentle to excess, his passions, when once roused, are by no means easily controuled. The circumstances of your situation had naturally excited his compassion, and his knowledge of your amiable characters deprived me of the only excuse he would admit as a palliation of my conduct. Lord Belmont's prohibition, he said, he could regard as none where honour and humanity were concerned. There was neither spirit nor principle in a slavish dependence on the will and opinions of others. In such a moment, prudence was

was selfishness, and obedience so implicit could only be deemed abject and servile.

He left me with these words; but soon after recollecting himself, he returned, not however with the intention of openly *apologizing* for his heat, but apparently from the wish of in some measure *atoning* for it by talking over the matter with calmness and temper.

This he did; and we parted at a late hour on good terms. What had passed however hung heavy on my spirits. I foresaw a world of tumult and opposition from this unfortunate discovery, and I determined to ease my mind of part of its burthen by openly disclosing my disquiets to the innocent cause of them, and entreating their forgiveness for the mental injury I have done them.

My son avows his resolution of applying to Lord Belmont in your favour, a determination, which far from dissuading him from performing I highly approve
of

of and shall myself enforce with that additional energy which admiration and regard must now produce; I cannot however avoid expressing my apprehensions that Roatsley's interference will irritate rather than persuade; and while to you he performs no essential service, he is disappointing and disobliging his grandfather at the most critical moment perhaps of his life: for I will not conceal any thing from you: I make no doubt indeed you must already have been informed of it: my son is soon to be happily settled in life with a most amiable and valuable young lady; *a tender affection subsists between them*; the match is in every respect desirable; but Lord Belmont's decided approbation can alone secure that of his young bride's family and connexions.

My heart, Sophia—oh! what did not my heart endure at these words? It died within me. I cast my eyes on the ground,

and avoided with the utmost care the penetrating look with which Lady Linrose regarded me. The agitating scene that had so recently passed between her son and myself flashed with redoubled anguish on my thoughts; the recollection was misery, and I felt as a culprit in his mother's presence. From this state of embarrassment and distress, I was presently in part relieved by the entrance of my little teizing companion Charlotte, who had been playing on the green before the house, and just at this moment appeared. Her Ladyship, not thinking it prudent to proceed in a subject of such moment before the child, having now explained herself sufficiently, shifted the conversation to less interesting topics; and being charmed with the little girl's beauty, began to chat with her.

Amongst other questions suited to her age, Lady Linrose, to set her a prattling, made the enquiry with which all children

Men have been so often importuned, viz. which did she love best, Mrs. Howard or Miss Seymour? and Charlotte, not in the least at a loss for a reply which delicacy even in infancy sometimes renders embarrassing, instantly replied—oh Miss Seymour certainly. Every body loves Miss Seymour, and the gentleman loves her too, for I know that well enough.

We shall get at all your secrets, Miss Seymour, cried Lady Linrose, smiling at my unspeakable confusion. But pray, my dear, turning to the child, who is this admirer of Miss Seymour's?

What does the child mean, cried I, with a look which I intended for surprise but which I am afraid partook infinitely more of alarm: pray don't be foolish Charlotte. But alas! I tried in vain to interrupt her; for delighted with being allowed to prate, and charmed with the importance of evidently distressing me, she answered Lady Linrose archly in a

E 2 loud

loud whisper—oh it must be her lover you know ; for he kissed her hand just now again and again in the Filbert walk.

Conceive, if it is possible, my conscious distress. Words can but faintly express my situation. I dreaded that every feature of my face would discover who this secret admirer was, and all spirit to rally it off forsook me. I thought at that moment this was certainly the most painful excess to which shame and apprehension could arrive ; but I was too soon taught how deplorably erroneous was this idea.

A short and most distressing pause succeeded to Charlotte's sally of gaiety. Lady Linrose, perceiving I suppose my uneasiness, politely forbore encreasing it by proceeding in her enquiries, and looking at her watch, rose to depart.

My sister asked the favour of her Ladyship's company to partake of a family dinner, if she was not otherwise engaged.

I sincerely

I sincerely regret, said she, that I promised my friend Lady Mary to be home by four o'clock: for as my visits, my dear Mrs. Howard, must be few and privately stolen, I lament that I cannot indulge myself with a longer one at present: but we know not how things may turn out, added she with great kindness—we may perhaps be more fortunate than we at present imagine.

Mr. Howard will regret not having shared in the honour of this visit, Madam, said my sister: and just as she spoke, her husband, who had been told who was with us, entered the parlour.

Lady Linrose received him with particular civility; and though on her way to the carriage, which had been ordered to the door, unfortunately turned back and sat down again for a few minutes.

After the usual compliments and enquiries—I flattered myself Mr. Roatsley had accompanied your Ladyship, said

E 3

Mr. Howard,

Mr. Howard, as I saw him at a distance little more than an hour ago with my sister in the walk; but it was not then in my power to join them, as I was employed procuring assistance to my old gardener, who has met with a very disagreeable accident this morning.

You must have mistaken some other person for Mr. Roatsley, said Mrs. Howard, for he has not favoured us with his company to-day.

Was he not here, sister, cried Mr. Howard turning to me with a surprise which I fear my too apparent distress sufficiently abated; for as if conscious of having committed some mistake, he left the sentence unfinished.

This was too dreadful. I believe Mr. Roatsley was walking to-day, said I at length: but the anguish of my feelings made my voice falter even during this short sentence; and Lady Linrose rose, before I had concluded it, curtsied in
silence

silence to me, and taking her leave, was attended to the hall by Mr. Howard and my sister.

Being left alone—oh God! cried I to myself, what a day of misery has this been? My imprudence can only be equalled by my shame and despair. I was in agonies. I now perceived that Roatsley was inevitably devoted to another. The declaration, my Sophia, which burst from his lips, his reason, his principles, even his heart, must condemn in the first moments of cool reflexion. The remembrance must wound him, and is an insult to me. He knows my weakness. It is no longer concealed as hitherto in the secret recesses of my heart. All the world knows it. Even his mother is no longer ignorant of the fatal secret; and what may she not conclude from the circumstances which have revealed it to her knowledge. Would to heaven I could hide my confusion and

folly for ever from the whole earth. But even if I could, how shall I ever conceal from myself the bitter, heart rending recollection of my own imprudence.

I was almost frantic: and the moment I perceived the carriage drive off, I flew into my own room and shut myself up: Fanny soon followed, demanding admittance. But I could not for some time prevail with myself to grant it; for although my heart is strongly and tenderly attached to her, a dissimilarity of disposition, and the circumstance of her being a married woman, which makes me apprehensive that her husband will be a sharer of all she knows, renders my confidence in her neither so comfortable nor so undisguised as it would otherwise prove. I am not so unjust as to suppose she could ever be prevailed with to betray by the slightest hint the secrets reposed in her; but the openness of her disposition renders me very suspicious
that

that she might be imprudent without being conscious of her error; and though I am thoroughly satisfied that she is as happy with Mr. Howard as it is possible for any woman to be in the married state, yet I feel a degree of indelicacy in painting anxieties and ardours which were so wholly excluded her own courtship, and which may for that reason appear romantic and unaccountable.

I partly confessed however the disagreeable situation in which I found myself involved; and without touching on the circumstances of the drawing, and the declaration it had produced, which indeed I cannot recall to mind and could not have mentioned without anguish unspeakable, I owned I had met with Roatsley that morning, and acknowledged the uneasiness which the little girl's raillery before his mother had occasioned me.

I know not what to make of him,

said Fanny : and undoubtedly this cousin of ours after all is a little unaccountable ; for as Miss Farnford observed, his mistress has surely some reason to complain of his attentions in another quarter ; and what can the man mean if he is actually on the eve of wedlock ? I don't understand his behaviour.

Alas ! thought I, I understand his behaviour but too well. It is my too apparent weakness and folly which have for a time produced in his heart a temporary inconstancy. Oh, Sophia ! how painful is this idea. All my pride of heart rises against it. I am sunk in my own opinion—I am humbled and miserable.

There is but one step to be taken, said I to my sister. To see Lady Linrose again would be at present peculiarly disagreeable ; and tho' she gave at parting no intimation of a speedy return, she may very possibly contrive to see us before she leaves the county, which I own I would

would wish to avoid, and a very simple and natural method of doing so has occurred to me : I think of hastening my visit to our dear and valuable Lady Aubrey. It is but setting off in a day or two instead of three weeks hence. I am sure of finding her at home, and shall this very day write to prepare her to expect me.

My sister, who has never been separated from me for many years, and who dislikes the idea of my leaving her even for a short time, made some little objections to this plan, alledging that Lady Linrose had requested her visit might be kept a secret, from which it was naturally to be inferred that it was not likely to be soon repeated.

I did not chuse to own explicitly that it was the son still more than the mother that I wished to avoid, tho' I told her that I thought I ought not to expose myself to attentions that were (tho' I believed

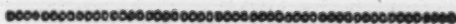
lieved unintentionally,) certainly an insult to my character: and I soon persuaded her to acknowledge, if such were my sentiments, that I ought not to defer my journey.

The difficulty that now remained, was how to conceal my real motive from Mr. Howard: but happily a fortunate pretence soon presented itself: in the evening, while we were chatting on the occurrences of the day and the unexpected visit we had received, a letter was brought me from our dear and respected friend, telling me that her impatience to embrace us had arisen to such a height, that she intreated, if Mr. and Mrs. Howard's visit must still be delayed, mine might be deferred no longer; requesting leave to send her own carriage and servants to convey me safely to Aubrey Castle.

This kind, maternal epistle, would at all events have determined my compliance, especially as Lady Meredith and
Sir

Sir William, I find, have left the castle, having been suddenly recalled home : but at this time it is particularly agreeable, as it at once relieves me from my difficulties in regard to Mr. Howard, removes me from the chance of again meeting the man I so anxiously wish never more to behold, and offers me an opportunity undisturbed and at a distance, for combating the commotions of my mind.

I have written Lady Aubrey that I shall be with her on Saturday evening. Her seat is forty five miles distant ; but by setting off very early, I hope to accomplish my journey without sleeping on the road, which I should dislike much. I have accepted the offer of her carriage and servants, which are to be here on Thursday evening.



LETTER XXI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

AUBREY CASTLE, JUNE 21.

I Arrived here last night about nine in the evening. The moment I alighted, our dear Lady Aubrey ran out to meet me in the hall. She pressed me to her bosom in the tenderest manner, and tears accompanied her embraces.

She led me to her dressing room; where, after a thousand anxious apprehensions on her part in regard to the fatigue I had undergone in travelling, and as many kind enquiries after my sister and Mr. Howard, I congratulated her with the most heartfelt satisfaction on the
happy

happy improvement of her health, indicated so visibly by the alteration in her looks.

The change is indeed striking. That glow which health and tranquillity only can preserve, now throws a lustre over features, the interesting beauty of which seemed before incapable of addition.

Both in mind and body, said that angelic woman, my amendment is wonderful: and how infinitely kind is it in my Hermione thus to soothe my heart by gratifying my ardent wishes for her company. My spirits, thank heaven, are calm and equal; and my frame, at no period robust, begins to feel the pleasing effects of internal peace and composure. I do not allow myself to indulge the conclusion to which inclination strongly impells me: on the contrary, I respect those exactions which the rights of society require, and the neglect of which I, who have perhaps a long life before me, may
yet

yet live to regret. I intend to force myself therefore to make proper returns to the visits and civilities paid me by my country neighbours; and have even already begun to form an intimacy with a very worthy couple, who have hitherto waved all ceremony, and who have been repeatedly my guests. They are at present with me; and though I should have much preferred the happiness of spending this evening *tete a tete* with you, I must submit to allow them a share of your company.

She then conducted me to the drawing room, where we found a lady and gentleman engaged at *picquet*. She presented me to both in the kindest manner. I shall say nothing, my dear Madam, said she to the lady, for leaving you my cards so long, as I bring my apology along with me in this amiable young friend, who has relieved my apprehensions

prehenſions by making her appearance at laſt.

Supper was announced immediately after; and as I was fatigued and exhausted, Lady Aubrey, whoſe ſolicitude and anxiety made her watch every change of my countenance, inſiſted that I ſhould retire early to reſt; and making her excuſes to Mr. and Mrs. Berry, who ſeem very ſenſible, agreeable people, ſhe led me to the chamber allotted me, where having ordered her maid to attend me, and ſatiſfied herſelf that every thing was prepared for my comfort and ſatiſfaction, ſhe tenderly embraced me and wiſhed me good night.

SUNDAY NIGHT.

Juſt as Lady Aubrey, her other gueſts, and myſelf were aſſembled this day at dinner, the arrival of the poſtman with
the

the newspapers induced Mr. Berry, who is a great politician, to hurry it over in order to read them aloud to the company. His lady, who seemed little amused by the prospect of the parliamentary orations, requested him to give us the news of the day before she set off on her rambles; and in compliance with her desire, he began the list of mortality, in which he suddenly read the death of the Right Honourable Lord Linrose at Lyons. I was extremely shocked; though merely from compassion for the friends who must lament his loss; and Mr. Berry seemed himself conscious of having committed an impropriety in mentioning, in presence of Lady Aubrey, a name that seemed destined never again to reach her ears; for I remarked that his voice changed as he read, tho' he had the presence of mind not to make his thoughts evident by stopping before he had finished the sentence. Lady Aubrey

brey seemed so much affected by the paragraph that she soon after left the room.

I wished much to follow her: but recollecting that any private conversation at that moment must naturally have led to subjects which I wish as much as possible in future to avoid, I forebore my intention; and when she returned some time after into the room, I rejoiced that I had not given way to my first impulse, as though her eyes were red, she conversed with a sedate cheerfulness which testified her determination of combating all melancholy retrospections that might lead to repining and despondency, and soon after proposed conducting me thro' the different apartments of this elegant abode (the morning having been employed at church) which infinitely surpassed my expectations in point of magnificence. It is much too spacious in my opinion for the residence of a single, solitary

solitary individual. However a large establishment of servants, and a chearful situation, in a great measure atone for this defect, which Lady Aubrey herself remarked to me while we were surveying it. It is the spot where my predecessors have resided time immemorial, said she; and my grandfather made it an article in his will that I should inhabit the house, and not suffer it to fall into decay.

There is a collection of most valuable pictures; and a large library, where I intend passing several hours every day, stored with the works of the best authors in all languages. I never was less in a mood for study; but for that very reason I must endeavour to force a relish for every employment that banishes musing. At present, however, I am incapable of any exertion; for I am really far from well, and as much exhausted as
if

if I had gone a journey of five hundred miles at least.

JUNE 24.

Our guests left us to-day, which I regret much. Mrs. Berry seldom leaves her family even for so long a period as a few days, and her present visit was a particular compliment to Lady Aubrey, to whom I suspect she and her husband have peculiar obligations.

I have received a letter from Fanny, dated Saturday evening. She writes to inform me of Lord Linrose's death, with which she had been made acquainted a few hours after I left her, by a note from Mr. Roatsley, merely mentioning the event and the time it took place, as a piece of respect due to relations of the family. Mr. Howard, she tells me, wrote a letter of condolence next morning,

ing, to which he received a very kind reply, assuring him that nothing but the shock he has received would have prevented his being at Hubert Hill long before now. Lord Belmont, he says, who has been severely wounded by this blow, meant to set off directly for England. He must be already on his journey, adds Mr. Roatsley; and as I intend meeting him at Calais, I flatter myself I shall soon merit his grateful acknowledgements for the essential service I mean to confer upon him—that of consoling him in a great measure for what death has snatched from his arms, by presenting to him relations who must and who ought to be so dear to his heart.

Fanny tells me, likewise, that she hears Lady Linrose and her family are soon to leave Holtenham Abbey, and to set out for Northamptonshire. She makes no doubt, she says, but Roatsley will call at Hubert Hill before his departure. Poor Lady

Lady Linrose, it seems, is much afflicted; and their stay with Lady Mary is to be no longer prolonged than till her Ladyship's spirits will admit of the exertion of a removal.

This letter, which I received last night in Lady Aubrey's presence, and which I withdrew to a window to read, threw an air of such depression over my countenance, that on turning round she enquired with anxious apprehension if all were well at Hubert Hill. This hint made me exert myself to appear cheerful; but I fancy I could not boast of my success. Since my arrival here Lady Aubrey has never recurred to those painful subjects which burst from her in the moments of agitation at Hubert Hill; and I could not have read my sister's letter to her without calling back her thoughts to many dismal reflections, the natural result of being told that Lord Belmont was on his way to England.

Our



JUNE 28.

Our style of living here is so rational and serene, and Lady Aubrey's tenderness and attention towards me so unremitting and endearing, that I should be happy in future to divide my time equally between Hubert Hill and Aubrey Castle. Lady Aubrey's conversation is a never failing source of interest and amusement. Her heart is so benevolent, and her understanding so highly cultivated, that it is impossible ever to tire in her company or desire other society. I am only distressed that she remarks my thoughtfulness; and is become so uneasy about my loss of appetite and palid colour, that she quite tortures herself with uneasy apprehensions, for which I cannot convince her there is not the slightest cause.

She

She begins to fear an approaching consumption; though I have assured her my lungs are made of adamant, and never were suspected of weakness in my life. This day she has actually consulted Doctor Elton, who has partly relieved her by declaring a journey to Bristol wholly unnecessary. He says my complaints are nervous, and advises me to try the effects of change of air and amusement—in other words that he don't know what to make of them: and Lady Aubrey has resolved that we shall set off in all haste upon a visit to Sir Ashton and Lady Hilbury; the latter of whom is sister to Sir William Meredith. Lady Aubrey has repeatedly rejected a number of pressing invitations from this family, as she had no intention of visiting at such a distance from home; but the notion of travelling, which she imagines will be of service to me, has determined her on going. There is a

vast resort of company at Hilbury Lodge; and she kindly flatters herself I shall be amused. But the very idea of leaving this place is disagreeable to me; and the prospect of a journey feels like an exertion that fatigues my spirits.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XXII.

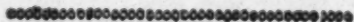
TO MISS BEAUMONT.

HILBURY LODGE, JULY 1.

WE arrived here last night after a pleasant journey. The weather was very favourable, and the country thro' which we passed so beautiful, that I was much more pleased than I expected to have been. I am considerably stronger
since

since we set out, and but for a languor and depression which still hang upon me, would think myself quite well.

The family here consists of Sir Ashton, his lady, and a large party of visitors. They reside constantly in the country, and live in what is called the style of old English hospitality. They received us with much kindness and cordiality, and we sat down to supper twenty in number in a large hall, the walls of which are decorated with family portraits of ancient grandmothers and maiden aunts, dressed in the fashions of their days, with a rose in the hand and a smirk on the countenance of each.



JULY 2.

A servant who was ordered to remain behind on some business of Lady Aubrey's and to join us here to-day, has

F 2.

brought

brought me another letter from Fanny which arrived the day I left the Castle. I besought her to write to me frequently, and she has most conscientiously performed her promise. She tells me that Lord Linrose, as he must now be called, paid them that morning a visit. He seems much affected by his brother's death, she says, and looks extremely melancholy and depressed. He expressed in strong terms his disappointment at my absence, and informed them he was to set off for Calais on the 12th of July, where he expected by that time to find Lord Belmont already arrived; if not, his Lordship had so settled his route that he should probably meet with him a stage or two further on.

Lady Linrose and the young ladies were next day to leave Holtenham Abbey. My sister adds a circumstance, for she is very minute, which was before unknown to me: I always imagined that
that

that Roatsley had made one of the family at Lady Mary's, but she mentions that he has merely visited there from time to time during the distress of his mother and sisters, having lodged at the house of his steward (his own mansion not yet being ready for his reception) who has a small farm on his estate. I suppose some punctilio relating to his situation with Lady Elizabeth occasions this distance and formality.

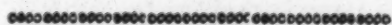
This letter was accompanied by one from Mr. Howard, dated the day after, in which he informs me that the evening before Sir Edward Sudbury had paid him a visit. A compliment, says he, which is entirely to be laid to your account; for nothing could exceed his evident disappointment and regret on finding you were from home. After expressing it in terms sufficiently plain, he demanded a private conference with me, entreated my interest with you in

his favour, and requested permission on your return to repeat his visits as your declared admirer. I told him, continues Mr. Howard, that all I could promise him was my good wishes, as I was wholly ignorant of your sentiments in regard to him; nor could I undertake to further his suit in any other manner than that of paving the way for his proposal by preparing you for it. I likewise told him you was not expected home for many weeks, and perhaps might even remain absent for a much longer period. Sir Edward eagerly caught at this proposal; requesting I would lose no time in executing it, and desiring me to acquaint you that he earnestly entreats permission to attend you at Aubrey Castle.

Regarding myself as Sir Edward's agent, concludes Mr. Howard, I cannot avoid adding, that possessed of an excellent character, an affluent fortune, and a
good

good figure and address, any woman, whose affections are not otherwise engaged, must enjoy a fair prospect of happiness in an union with him.

I had scarce finished reading this letter, when the bell summoned me to dinner. Our party, large as it was, had gained the addition of several fox hunting gentlemen, who sat down to table in their boots, with their cropped hair quite free from powder, and in a dress that would have disgraced their footmen. Being the first of this class I have seen, I was so much astonished by their appearance, that I could not credit my ears, when Lady Hilbury, introducing one of them to me, called him Sir John something or other, for I have forgot his surname.



JULY 3.

The moment I was alone with Lady Aubrey last night, I mentioned to her the substance of Mr. Howard's letter. Well, my love, said she, and pray what are the objections to the match? Are there any deficiencies in point of fortune? If so, easily can these be removed; for is not my Hermione my own child; the child of my bosom; and she embraced me affectionately.

I instantly satisfied her that the obstacles against it resulted merely from the feelings of my heart, which were wholly repugnant to the union; and a thousand times I thanked her for the kind adoption; a tie which I told her, and told her with sincerity, I had neither wish nor intention of weakening by any other that might divide my affections.

I am much mistaken, said she smiling,
and

and looking me earnestly in the face, if my Hermione's heart is formed for the reception of no warmer sentiments than those a fond mother can hope to excite.

A blush of conscious confession tinged my cheeks. I replied that Sir Edward, at least, never would rival that dear mother in my heart; nor could I persuade myself that any attachment, however violent, would for an instant diminish or interfere with that fervent affection for her which constituted almost the first happiness of my existence: and indeed, Sophia, I did not exaggerate my feelings in expressing them thus warmly; for my unexpected intimacy with this angelic woman has produced an interest that supports my sinking spirits and feels like the acquisition of a new sense that gives life and energy to all the others.

Well, my love, said she, I live in hopes of one day witnessing that you make good your promise. If I lose *your*

regard I lose all that attaches me to my present state of being. But I am not so selfish as to desire to engross it wholly. Your felicity is my first and dearest wish; and I would not secure my own at the price of diminishing yours. I hope therefore to see you happily settled, in that state which undoubtedly is capable of producing, and often does bestow, the highest degree of comfort.

I have written in the strongest terms to Mr. Howard, requesting him to inform Sir Edward that it is impossible for me to grant permission for a visit which would put him to the trouble of a fruitless and unnecessary journey.



JULY 6.

This house is by much too gay for an invalid. Different visitors succeed each other daily; and the same observation is repeatedly

repeatedly made—"I'm afraid, Ma'am, you a'nt well." I am quite teased with it. Lady Aubrey has consulted an able physician here, who has assured her there is nothing in the least alarming in my complaint, and has prescribed early hours, regularity of living, and asses milk, which restoratives are to be procured with much greater ease and convenience at Aubrey Castle, than in this hospitable family; where the constant bustle of a number of people, and the necessity of submitting to the established hours, prevents that composure and quiet so salutary to weak health. Lady Aubrey I am sure finds it equally uncomfortable, and has readily agreed to my request of shortening our visit.

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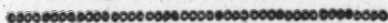
JULY 7.

After sundry remonstrances, and innumerable pressing intreaties to prolong our stay,

stay, Lady Aubrey has at length made her point good, and we are to depart on Monday.

Were I in better spirits, I might divert you not a little with an account of the different people I have met with since our abode here, particularly with this fox hunting baronet, Sir John Bennet, who professes himself my admirer, tho' our acquaintance has not been of above a few days standing, and who makes downright love to Lady Aubrey, in hopes she will give him an invitation to Aubrey Castle. I wonder any man can think of me, when Lady Aubrey is present. It is amazing that every man who sees her is not distractedly in love with her. She is not yet thirty six; and tho' the stile of dress in which she indulges, indicates a more advanced period, her countenance is uncommonly youthful.

I was



JULY 9.

I was quite astonished to-day on entering the drawing room to find Sir Edward Sudbury. As it was scarce possible he could have been made acquainted with the contents of my reply to Mr. Howard's letter, which was only sent away on Friday last, I knew not what to make of this visit, which he soon took an opportunity of insinuating had been the sudden consequence of his being accidentally informed that I was at Hilbury Lodge, with which family he is intimately acquainted. I suppose he must have considered permission to wait on me at Aubrey Castle at least as very precarious; and I imagine regarded this circumstance as a favourable opportunity for urging his suit without unpoliteness or impropriety.

I endea-

I endeavoured, by the gravity and reserve with which I attended to him, to explain what reception his proposal was likely to receive, and if possible to deter him from a pursuit that could only be succeeded by mortification and uneasiness; but Sir Edward was in unbounded spirits, and would take no hint that seemed repugnant to his wishes. When our departure to-morrow however was accidentally mentioned by Lady Hilbury in the course of the evening, a cloud suddenly overcast poor Sir Edward's countenance, his vivacity forsook him, and with a very submissive but melancholy countenance he seized a moment while the company were settling their card parties, to request leave to have the honour of attending us, and besought that I would allow him to entreat Lady Aubrey's permission.

I told him gravely that it was wholly out of my power to grant his request.

The

The apprehension of deceiving him, and the desire of putting a speedy period to hopes which deluded only to render the disappointment more painful, made me pronounce these few words in a voice so determined, that my heart instantly reproached me for the pain I was constrained to inflict; while it's secret feelings explained to me so powerfully what Sir Edward's must prove. I therefore added, tho' with equal steadiness, that I should always remain sensible of the favour he intended me.

Having forced myself to be thus explicit, distressing as it was, I hastily turned away; and Sir Edward, thunder-struck at my prohibition, instantly left the room. He did not appear for some hours; and during the whole evening repeated enquiries of where he could be, and expressions of wonder what he could have done with himself, were made by the whole company.

Sir Ed-

Sir Edward at length entered ; but not till we were all seated at supper. He supported the general attack with much embarrassment ; and said in excuse for his absence, that he had been enjoying this delightful evening along the side of the canal. This occasioned much mirth. The refinement of his taste was admired, his neglect of the ladies at the card party heartily laughed at, and finally it was determined that, as the sole excuse his failure in politeness would admit of, he must make a formal acknowledgment to the company that he was deeply involved in a hopeless passion, in which case only the ladies agreed to accord him their forgiveness.

How Sir Edward looked, on this railery, I know not, for I was little less confused than himself, and did not once dare to throw my eyes that way. His awkwardness was matter of additional entertainment ; and since he would not
make

make a verbal confession, Lady Hilbury told him his silence should be taken as proof positive.

Lady Aubrey, with her usual humanity, distressed at this persecution, fortunately relieved poor Sir Edward by hinting a wish to retire early on account of our journey to-morrow; and we separated at least an hour sooner than usual.

I attended her to her dressing room; where dismissing her maid—I cannot help being rather surprised, my dear, said she. This Sir Edward appears a very amiable young man, and his behaviour this evening convinces me that he is tenderly attached to you. Is your determination still to reject him? does your heart say nothing in his favour?

Oh! nothing, nothing indeed, cried I. I pity and feel for his disappointment; but to be his wife would render me miserable for ever.

I spoke with such unnecessary warmth, when I had been listening to no arguments

ments that could have roused my opposition, and had no solicitations to apprehend from the tenderness of my dear Lady Aubrey, that she looked at me some moments with a face of perplexity. Then heaven forbid you should be his wife, my love. I do not mean to become the advocate of a man of whom I have seen so little. I am too conscious of the inestimable value of my Hermione's heart, not to be as nice in my choice of the man on whom she is to bestow it, as she can possibly be for herself. I am only surprised that a heart, young, warm, and enthusiastic, which has been in a manner secluded from intercourse with mankind, and which cannot for that reason have been either tainted with the vanity of general admiration or deluded with the destructive idea that in high birth and titles a gratification is to be sought, unattainable in a more moderate sphere: I am surprised, I repeat, that a heart like
yours

yours should have remained unmoved by the assiduities of a man, whose outward appearance speaks so highly in his favor, and whose character you allow to be estimable and even amiable:

To this observation I could make no answer. To a friend so dear, so respectable, so kindly and warmly interested in my felicity, to have given an evasive and disingenuous reply, was impossible. Gratitude and affection condemned the very idea. Yet to make a confession of the state of my affections, to avow that a secret and hopeless attachment devoured my peace, destroyed my health, and steeled my heart against the sollicitations of all men but one, was equally impracticable. Oh Sophia! such an avowal must have been so humiliating, so painfully severe, it must have led besides to a train of particulars so interwoven with Lady Aubrey's misfortunes, that this act of confidence might have given no less pain to her feelings than it must have conveyed.

conveyed to mine. After hesitating therefore for a moment, whether from respect due to the beloved friend who honoured me with the name of daughter, I should not throw myself into her arms and instantly confess my weakness, I found that love was to her a subject I could not force myself to mention.

These ideas, which passed with the velocity of lightning through my mind, sealed up my lips; and Lady Aubrey perceiving that I was embarrassed, expressed a desire to go to rest, and kindly wished me a good night, which afforded me an opportunity of retiring. I am convinced however, that painful as might have been the communication, I should undoubtedly have avowed all at that moment had not the above mentioned apprehension deterred me.

On entering my chamber, I perceived a letter directed for me; which I found was the fruits of Sir Edward's moonlight medita-

meditations, and must have considerably shortened his walk. I suppose he had bribed one of the maids to lay it on my toilet.

Adieu, my dear, dear Sophia. My eyes are quite sunk with sleep.

H. SEYMOUR.



LETTER XXIII.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

AUBREY CASTLE, JULY 13.

WE are returned here, to my inexpressible satisfaction; and if the perturbation of my spirits will allow of any kind of method or connexion in my narrative, pray receive the particulars which occurred immediately on our arrival.

We set off early on Monday last. Poor
Sir Ed-

Sir Edward ! his uneasiness at seeing us depart was very apparent. But as I must hasten to more interesting circumstances, I shall merely tell you, that having in his letter desired leave to receive his sentence, as he called it, from Lady Aubrey's lips, I intreated her at once to put a final period to his suit ; which she accordingly contrived to do during a short walk on the terrace after breakfast. He was much shocked, she said, but seemed to regard his dismissal as positive and unalterable.

We arrived pretty late at the castle. Lady Aubrey, after ordering tea, of which she is particularly fond, left the room to give some family orders, and soon after the housekeeper entered and presented to me a letter, which she told me had been brought three days after my departure, by a servant, who finding I was from home, enquired when I was expected to return ; and being informed that

that our absence was only designed for a week at most, he left it in strict charge to the housekeeper, telling her it must be given into Miss Seymour's own hands, and requesting particular care might be taken of it.

This appearance of precaution conveyed an idea into the good woman that probably the letter contained bills for money ; which suspicion induced her, instead of sending it by post to Hilbury Lodge, on finding our stay prolonged, to lock it carefully in her drawer till our arrival should put it in her power to discharge her trust faithfully.

A gentleman, she added, had called that very morning, and having enquired for the housekeeper, had asked what was become of the letter given into her hands by a servant a fortnight before ; and finding we were that day expected, had requested her to present it to me immediately on my arrival.

This

This prelude alarmed me, tho' I knew not why. The woman withdrew: I opened it in trepidation: and what was my astonishment and agitation on perceiving the signature of Linrose. I sunk breathless into a chair, and scarce credited the sense which enabled me to peruse the following lines.

When I consider that perhaps at this moment Miss Seymour does me the injustice to imagine me the most insensible, the most ungrateful of mankind, I tremble to address her; and when I reflect, that from an unhappy fatality of events it is not impossible but that to these accusations, cruel and injurious, may be superadded those of inconsistency and duplicity, I am wholly bereft of the composure with which I should wish to enter on an explanation of my conduct.

Ah! Madam, is it then possible that
you

you suspect not only the tenderness of my heart but its honour and integrity; that you conclude me so devoid of principle, so lost to shame, as to offer vows to you which are the right of another. Ah! loveliest, most amiable of women! sink me not in my own estimation by acknowledging I was ever for an instant depraved so low in your's. Believe me not capable of a deed so base; a deed—for which violence of passion and force of temptation, even of such temptation as in that case I must have had to encounter, afford but impotent and feeble palliations. No, Madam, had I been fettered by the slightest ties, had my heart sought to insinuate itself into the bosom of sensibility, and success afterwards ungratefully sickened me at the pursuit, my love, my adoration of Miss Seymour, might have tortured my bosom, but never should it have passed my lips.

A chain of particulars, too intricate,

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G

too

too tedious for distant discussion, has led to the unfortunate and mistaken notion of my approaching union—particulars which, when I have the honour of seeing you, I hope you will have the goodness to allow me to explain; in the mean while, for the sake of heaven, permit me to exist by the flattering hope, that the cruel and sudden reverse in your behaviour, from softness the most captivating, the most angelic, to the coldest severity and most barbarous reserve, owed its source solely to this perplexing report. Forgive me, Miss Seymour, for recalling your thoughts to recollections, which, dashed as they are with bitterness, dwell on my memory with sensations of delight, gratitude, and exultation, that never but with my last expiring sigh can be erased from my heart: yet what a painful allay succeeded to this moment of happiness! your downcast look, and silent haste to escape from me, were not
the

the blushing effects of the timid and diffident regret with which you reflected on the softness you could not wholly and cruelly disguise from the man who adored you, and who, supplicating at your feet, claimed surely some little sensibility to a passion that has so long proved the destruction of his peace. Ah no! these amiable sufferings had already inflicted too much pain, had already encreased if possible my enthusiastic admiration, even while I lamented their poignancy and partook of the uneasiness they occasioned you. No! you suspected my honour, you believed me unworthy of your slightest regard; and a rigour the most inflexible taking place of softer emotions, barred every avenue to your heart and rendered it inaccessible to all my prayers and entreaties.

Why this vindication was not earlier attempted may probably surprise you. But while your behaviour perplexed and

tormented me, this explanation of its severity never once occurred to my imagination; till it was this day happily suggested, from having been informed that the rumours respecting my engagements were so serious and so current as to gain universal credit.

Miss Seymour may believe, that after parting from her at a moment so arduous, I did not mean to allow twenty four hours to elapse without imploring her to acquaint me wherein I had had the misfortune to offend her: on the contrary I intended to have written from Holtenham Abbey, where I was engaged to spend the day, to have demanded my accusation and justified myself in her opinion; but on my arrival there, which was not till late, what a scene awaited me—my mother and sisters had just received the account of my brother's death; and in the first moments of despair, were weeping over the letter that
had

had announced this fatal intelligence. To Miss Seymour, I am not afraid to confess, that this severe stroke drove for some time all other ideas from my thoughts; even her beloved image was obscured, and every tender recollection supplanted by grief: but reflections so long cherished, so dear to the heart, cannot long lie dormant in the mind; and I soon found that the amiable source of all my hopes and expectations of happiness in life, could alone heal the wounds which death had inflicted.

In acquainting my friends at Hubert Hill with this misfortune, I imagined I offered a sufficient apology both for my silence and my absence: but what was my concern this day, upon visiting them, to find that at near fifty miles distance, you must have remained for several days ignorant of the melancholy event that had rendered me incapable of paying you my devoirs. Ah! Madam, what must

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your

your opinion of me have been during this interval? and how must this apparent neglect have augmented and confirmed every suspicion of my guilt.

Forgive me, I entreat you, for having thus long trespassed on your time and patience. But at present, alas! I have no other means of approaching you. My mother I cannot leave in her deep, heart-felt distress, till my journey to Dover, where I must be by the 12th, obliges me to depart. Yet have I a thousand things to trouble you with. Will you allow me, in my way thither, to pay you my respects? Will you condescend to introduce me to the inestimable Lady Aubrey, the contemplation of whose character elevates my mind? and will you deign to hear me at your feet implore the continuance of your favour to him who has the honour of subscribing himself

your most obedient

and devoted servant,

LINROSE.

HILTON FARM, JUNE 28.

The tumult of my mind on perusing this astonishing letter was unutterable. My senses were almost annihilated; and a sensation of distrust and consternation half persuaded me to doubt if what I read really came from the hands of Lord Linrose.

In this state of perturbation I was surprised by Lady Aubrey, who entered the drawing room while I was so wholly absorbed in secret gratitude and delight, that unconscious of observation, I repeated aloud, clasping my hands together, good God! is it possible?

My dear, cried she, approaching in haste, surprised at the situation in which she beheld me—for heaven's sake tell me what is the matter?

This question awakened me from the confusion that had seized all my faculties. But unable to reply, I could only answer by pressing the hand that had so kindly seized mine.

My agitation astonished and alarmed her: for the two extremes of pleasure and distress, are upon a cursory view very similar in their effects. She imagined some sudden calamity had overwhelmed me; and pressing me with sympathetic tenderness to her bosom, entreated me to tell her what had given me so much pain.

I could not avoid smiling at the expression; and hastened to acquaint her that I had no subject for uneasiness. I blush for myself, dearest Madam, said I, but you I well know will be all indulgence to the weakness which in a moment of such unspeakable agitation I am unable to overcome. I have a long, long tale to disclose to you. My heart has been humbled, mortified, and oppressed; and I am certain your goodness will allow of some excuse in the sudden, soothing relief it has so unexpectedly received.

That tale can never appear long to me,
of

of which my Hermione is the heroine. But do sit down and compose yourself. I believe I can almost guess the most material points of the story. Is there not a hero in the tale, my love? at least so I have long suspected; though I forbore giving you the pain of soliciting your confidence, which I was certain would not have been denied me but for particular reasons that must have rendered the communication distressing.

Oh! Madam, I will tell you all, cried I, penetrated with her goodness; and be assured no ungrateful doubt of your kind sympathy and indulgence induced me to lock up my secret pangs in my own bosom. Ah! no! diffidence and bashfulness alone at first deterred me from entering upon so awkward a subject; and afterwards, since my residence here, I have not only anxiously wished that all the world might remain in ignorance of what has passed, but that if possible I

might banish it for ever from my own remembrance.

But as your past uneasiness seems, if I may judge from the intelligence of your countenance, to have given way to happier prospects, I hope you are going to have the goodness to satisfy my curiosity. The man who has created such ravages in the bosom of my Hermione has no little reason to be vain, and I am convinced must merit the distinction, else he would not have enjoyed it; but pray tell me who is he? I cannot possibly have seen him, yet I feel I am already in his interests.

He is one of my relations, Madam, answered I, hesitating. He is my cousin; and the grandson——

Of Lord Belmont, interrupted Lady Aubrey. I have frequently heard of the young man while abroad, and his friends talked loudly in his favour; and though my connection with the family has been
long

long laid aside, I have ever retained secretly in my heart a strong and lively partiality for the good old man and all his children. A tear rushed into her eye as she spoke. The husband of Hermione, continued she, must ever have possessed my warmest regard, but I shall not love him less, for the many recollections——

Oh! Madam! cried I, sobbing in her arms, for the sake of heaven banish all painful recollections. Let the past be sunk in oblivion. Look only forward. Think of nothing but the consolation, the salutary comfort which a heart like your's is formed to experience from the unalterable duty, gratitude, and affection of those highly favoured children of your adoption, who honour you with filial piety and love you with enthusiastic fervour.

Be not distressed, my dear, said she, recovering her sedate composure; my heart

heart is far from sad at this moment. How indeed should it be so at a moment when my daughter's countenance brightens with secret complacency through her tears.

She then once more entreated me to be explicit; and beginning at the epocha of our rencontre in the packet boat, I related sincerely and without disguise every circumstance in which Lord Linrose has been concerned.

Lady Aubrey listened with the kindest and most anxious solicitude, and entered with interest into all my emotions. She felt for my disappointments, rejoiced when any intervals of gratification seemed to afford me a recompence for my sufferings, exulted at the generosity of Lord Linrose's conduct, and shed tears at Lord Belmont's cruelty. He is reckoned by many a rigid character, said she, but to me he was ever all gentleness and condescension; and even his faults I
am

am convinced have their origin in virtue. He is strict, and perhaps may be esteemed severe; but that severity is the result of a rectitude of heart, which being subject to few weaknesses, possesses little indulgence for errors it never knew. His benevolence is warm, and his feelings but too keen. Where they have suffered from the misconduct of others, his resentment is proportioned to what he has endured. But his conduct in regard to his grand children is by no means in tone with the general tenor of his principles, which are founded on strict justice and unbiaſſed integrity. It leads me to imagine that ſome previous prepoſſeſſion muſt have taken root in his mind; and it is not unlikely that Lady Linroſe (being herſelf deceived) may have occaſioned or at leaſt confirmed this diſguſt, even without the ſlighteſt deliberate deſign of injuring your cauſe. At all events, on his arrival all can be
easily

easily and effectually explained; and you have now but little reason to dread his inflexibility while you possess an advocate so thoroughly well disposed as Lord Linrose, to exert all his rhetoric in your behalf.

I had just satisfied her in regard to the part Lady Linrose has acted, and concluded my narrative, acknowledging my astonishment and perturbation on receiving an explanation so unlooked for of the seeming inconsistencies in Lord Linrose's conduct, when a note was brought me from him. He was, as I had suspected from the housekeeper's account, and as his own letter led me to imagine, on his way to Dover; and wrote from the inn, on the great road, about four miles from this place.

He laments his disappointment on finding I was not yet returned when he called this morning, and requests leave
to

to be allowed to wait on me to-morrow morning.

The moment I had read this note, I gave it to Lady Aubrey, who desired me to offer her compliments to his Lordship, and to request in her name the favour of his company to-morrow at breakfast.

I then withdrew to my dressing room to answer it. Glad of a pretext for being a few moments alone, I threw myself into a chair, and gave way to a reverie of the most enchanting nature. What a revolution in my mind had a few hours effected ! What a reverse, from the depression that had but that very morning almost wholly overpowered me ! My spirits were elated to a degree of enthusiasm ; and I thanked the Almighty with a fervour till now unfelt for the delightful prospect that on all sides surrounded me. I sat down at length to my bureau. Had my pen followed the dictates of my heart,

I knew]

I knew I should have committed my note to the flames instead of sending it away; yet I could not affect a cold ceremony, so opposite to my own feelings and to that affection which Lord Linrose had declared in terms of such warmth. Here is what I was obliged to rest satisfied with at last.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD LINROSE.

I must confess my astonishment on having a letter from Lord Linrose put this evening into my hands immediately upon my return to Aubrey Castle. I will not affect a reserve so foreign to my feelings, and so injurious to the favourable sentiments with which your Lordship honours me, as to deny that my surprise at its contents was not unmixed with pleasure, and that the perusal relieved me from much perplexity and even uneasiness.

Lady

Lady Aubrey, of whose elevated qualities you have formed so just an idea, anxiously desires the pleasure of knowing you. She requests your Lordship's company at breakfast to-morrow: and permits me to assure you of a favourable reception from all the present inhabitants of her residence.

H. SEYMOUR.

AUBREY CASTLE, JULY 13.

Having dispatched my note, I returned to Lady Aubrey. Oh! Sophia! how amiable, how exalted is this woman! Her spirits were this evening exhilarated even to gaiety, her eyes sparkled with pleasure, and the agonizing recollections which remembrance might be supposed on this occasion to have naturally renewed, were wholly suppressed or rather supplanted by the prospect of my approaching happiness. She asked me a thousand questions in regard to Lord Lin-
rose;

rose, made me minutely describe his person, and insisted on my shewing her a little sketch on ivory, which at Hilbury Lodge soothed many a melancholy hour, but which I had at length determined to destroy as it afforded an insinuating indulgence extremely ill adapted to that victory over my sensibility which I have so often attempted without success. This preliminary towards conquering my weakness, you will perhaps sagely observe, ought to have been the first step. I grant it; but indeed you must be precisely in my situation before you can prove an adequate judge of the difficulties of such a sacrifice.

We separated early; and I have been writing while I ought to have been in bed. But I have little chance of sleeping; though the weakness of my frame at present renders the agitations of the day so violent on my spirits, that I feel quite exhausted, and think of to-morrow's
interview

interview even with some degree of apprehension. Yes, Sophia; for is not there something formidable in the idea of seeing Lord Linrose after the weakness of my behaviour at our last meeting.

JULY 14.

I had no inclination to sleep when I gave over writing last night, but I began to consider that if I did not contrive to get a few hours rest after the mental and bodily fatigues of the preceding day, I should look still more like a ghost than I already do; and really you never beheld any thing so pale and so ugly as I am grown of late.

I suspect however my complexion was sufficiently florid this morning, when Lord Linrose entered the breakfasting parlour; where dreading the formality of
of

of being called down to him, I rather chose to be ready to receive him.

Lady Aubrey was not yet stirring, so that we were *tete a tete*. But I cannot give you all the particulars of our conversation. A love interview, except to the parties immediately concerned, is always absurd; but I fancy you will shrewdly suspect that I found nothing extremely ridiculous in the eager urgency with which Lord Linrose, after an explanation the most impassioned, entreated my permission to apply to Lord Belmont for his consent and approbation, the instant he found a favourable opportunity for interesting himself in my affairs, tho' my confusion during part of the scene might perhaps have afforded *you* some amusement.

He spoke with such feeling of my severity, as he called it, and of my condescension with so many expressions of gratitude and obligation, that he half banished

nished the shame which the recollection recalled; but I besought him never more to mention, and if possible to forget, all that had passed

I think, cried he smiling, I shall find it no easy matter to comply with that injunction; for I have absolutely existed upon the remembrance ever since I had the happiness of seeing you; and undoubtedly you cannot have the cruelty to wish to deprive me of the memory of one blessed moment that recompensed me for the anguish of the tedious hours that succeeded. Oh! Miss Seymour! added he, how could you leave me with such frigid abruptness? how could you poison and embitter the joy with which the delightful discovery of your pitying sympathy had overwhelmed me? Yet what must your opinion have been of me during the unhappy period of my silence? how must you have despised the man, who one day vowing eternal fidelity at
your

your feet with all the urgency of passionate affection, could the next apparently relinquish his hopes, and abandon a pursuit to which a reward, a prize is annexed, that may well fix the most fickle and animate the most phlegmatic lover, that ever pretended to the passion. Alas! you knew not the blow, which from overpowering my spirits rendered me for some little time wholly incapable even of explaining myself on this interesting subject; till a visit from Bradshaw, a few days after, led me in the confidence of friendship partly to confess to him my situation in regard to you. I owned that a fortunate moment had inspired me with courage to declare the passion, which he well knew had so long tormented me with all the misery of continual apprehension, doubt, and uneasiness. I acknowledged that Miss Seymour had listened to me with angelic softness; but that her behaviour had all at once betrayed

trayed a displeasure for which she had not deigned to assign a cause ; and that she had left me with abrupt haste, notwithstanding my most earnest intreaties only for a few moments stay.

Bradshaw at once cleared up my doubts, enabled me to comprehend what had appeared so unaccountably mysterious, and by informing me of the credit with which the report of my marriage has been circulated (a report, he told me, which even Miss Seymour herself had once hinted to him) enabled me by an immediate explanation to relieve my own mind and convince her's of the injustice of her suspicions.

His Lordship then entered more fully into the particulars which have given rise to this idea. Circumstances, said he, have lately discovered to me that Lord Mortonbury and my grandfather very early formed the plan of a connection between Lady Elizabeth and myself.

The

The young lady's rank, fortune, and accomplishments, undoubtedly render her an object of singular importance to those who look in matrimony for nothing beyond such advantages; and Lord Belmont flattered himself the friendship which subsisted between the two families, by affording opportunities for frequent intercourse, would facilitate his wishes. This plan however, like most others which rest on adventitious events, failed of success; my early intimacy with Lady Elizabeth, far from promoting warmer sentiments, merely served to discover to me those little foibles which in a lesser or greater degree pervade every human character, but which in her no tender partiality on my part either palliated or concealed. Lady Elizabeth's errors, though not of a more unamiable nature than those of most women of her rank who have received a similar education, were particularly ill suited to my disposition,

disposition, and to those views of domestic felicity to which, even in my most dissipated moments, my wishes have invariably pointed; and soon suspicious of my grandfather's views, which must have utterly destroyed all my future prospects of happiness and which I found every individual of the family so anxiously desired, since my last return from the Continent, I have uniformly endeavoured by the most respectful distance to demonstrate that I did not presume to regard myself as entitled to offer my addresses to one of the first heiresses in England.

Some weeks ago, however, I received a letter from Lord Belmont, in plain terms proposing the match to my consideration, and representing it to me in all those glowing colours which a favourite plan ever receives from the pen of the contrivers. My mother too, who had often before hinted to me her wishes on the same subject and to whom my

Lord had written at the same time, used all her rhetoric to point out the splendid advantages that must result from this union.

Ah! why, my Lord, cried I interrupting him—why then have you solicited my consent to an application, which if such are Lord Belmont's views, never can prove successful.

Dearest Miss Seymour, cried he warmly, how can you form a conclusion so alarming and so perfectly unjust, merely from a simple explanation which you force me to give you. If you will only listen to me, you will find these apprehensions quite imaginary, and wholly void of foundation. Had fate indeed placed you in that situation, in which till so lately I beheld you doomed to remain, unconnected and unknown, obscure in rank, and distinguished only by your elegance, your merit, and accomplishments; in this case, though you must

must ever have continued the first and dearest object of my affections, yet my friends I allow might have objected; and the certainty that Lord Belmont's approbation was not to be hoped for where no circumstances of birth or fortune presented themselves, has not only tortured my bosom ever since the moment in which I was favoured with your acquaintance, but has been the origin of all that inconsistency of conduct which must have often perplexed and even sometimes perhaps offended you. Determined at one moment to conquer an attachment that I knew must involve me in all the difficulties of disunion with my family, I sedulously avoided you with fortitude and forbearance; conscious the next of my utter inability to struggle against a passion which insinuated itself into my heart beyond all power of resistance, I sought with avidity what I had before shunned with apprehension,

and gave myself wholly up to the delightful illusions of hope and tenderness. Such being the fluctuating state of my mind for many months past, what was the relief, the exultation I experienced, on the discovery I made at Hubert Hill. The knowledge of your real rank and situation at once relieved me from all the misery of this continual contest between inclination and principle. My whole soul was in a tumult of joy. Lord Belmont's approbation I considered as secured; and from that instant eagerly watched an opportunity for pouring out at your feet the feelings with which it was overwhelmed. When there, too, I found the sympathetic softness of my Hermione——

Oh stop! for heaven's sake! cried I, interrupting him impatiently. Would to God you had never found the moment you desired. I foresee a world of trouble and misery from my unpardonable

ble folly and weakness. Oh! what on earth could make me so unguarded! Lord Belmont, inflexible in his determinations and prepossessions, never will be induced to relinquish his hopes of an alliance on which his views have so long and so invariably rested, and must receive with augmented prejudice and unconquerable repugnance, the grandchild who so unpropitiously appears to interrupt his schemes and disappoint his wishes. Of this, my Lord, you must yourself be convinced, even while you labour to persuade me of the contrary.

Shocked at the alarming prospect which presented itself so forcibly to my apprehension that I could not conceal my fears, my Lord exerted himself powerfully and successfully to dispel the notion of my grandfather's inflexibility; and I soon began to forget the idea that had given me so much pain. He represented to me that it was extremely unnatural and im-

probable to suppose, that his Lordship, when satisfied as to the propriety and decorum of our past conduct, would receive, otherwise than with open arms and delighted satisfaction, children who seemed sent as from heaven for the comfort and support of his old age. That his Lordship had hitherto rejected and disowned us, could merely be attributed, he said, to some mistaken prejudice which must have found its way to his mind even on the Continent. To suspect him now of an obstinacy so hardened, without any apparent motive except the cruelty and injustice of his nature, was to accuse him of a savage disposition extremely opposite to his benevolent temper, and indeed almost below human nature itself.

I longed extremely to ask him if Lady Linrose was yet acquainted with the declaration he had made to me; and if so, in what manner she had received it; but the entrance of Lady Aubrey, who however
did

did not appear till long after her usual hour, interrupted all further private conversation between us.

She received his Lordship with the most insinuating kindness, and with that flattering ease which so agreeably discards the cold ceremony of a first interview. Immediately after breakfast, during which Lady Aubrey entertained her guest with the polite freedom due to an esteemed and long known friend, his Lordship told us he was constrained to set off without further delay. I must make up for this indulgence, said he, by travelling with the utmost expedition; yet with all the celerity I can effect, I think my Lord Belmont will have to wait my arrival at Calais; for as I did not apprehend the disappointment of finding you absent, I made no provision for the last day I spent on the road.

He then took leave, recommending, in a low voice, but with a look which

testified how sanguine were his expectations, the success of this important journey to my best wishes; and Lady Aubrey, who overheard him, told him with an expressive smile that her prayers attended his expedition.

After he was gone, she expressed her admiration of him in terms so strong as to gratify me beyond measure. His figure, she said, seemed formed to captivate, and the pleasing intelligence of his countenance demonstrated that nature had not rested his merit solely on external superiority. She was enchanted with his address. From what I have heard of him, said she, with infinite kindness, and from what I have seen, I am convinced that he is not unworthy of my dear child.

I can hardly believe, Sophia, that four and twenty hours have effected such a revolution in my mind. My prospects have undergone so great a change, that I almost
imagine

imagine I am in a dream. I am indeed in Fairy Land, and all things smile around me. To find myself the object of Lord Linrose's fondest partiality, to know that the most material obstacles to our mutual happiness never existed but in my own apprehensions, and to perceive a probable ray of hope of soon finding myself surrounded by friends and relations, disposed to love, and willing to be beloved by me—oh! Sophia! what a blessed reverse from our late friendless, solitary state!

I have just had a note from Fanny, intimating that she and Mr. Howard (having got all his matters adjusted) will be with us on Thursday.

Adieu, my beloved Sophia. I think with delight on the pleasure the perusal of this packet will give to your warm sympathetic heart.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XXIV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

JULY 18.

MY sister and Mr. Howard arrived yesterday. I walked out in hopes of meeting their carriage; but they had taken another road, and had sat half an hour with Lady Aubrey before I returned to the house.

This interval she had employed in explaining to them the present posture of affairs. Mr. Howard was overjoyed, but less astonished than Lady Aubrey expected; for he had long been conscious, he told her, that a mutual attachment subsisted between Lord Linrose and

and me; and however unaccountable his Lordship's conduct had sometimes appeared, and however well authenticated the report of his marriage had been, he had ever suspected the validity of its foundation, and foreseen what in that case the issue would prove.

Fanny was quite intoxicated with joy. She kissed Lady Aubrey again and again for having communicated such good news, and when I entered the room, I was obliged to entreat her by a look not instantly to bring on the subject. But my caution was quite unnecessary. She seemed ready to dance from *gaieté de cœur*; and at length unable to contain herself longer—Mr. Howard, cried she, you must salute Lady Linrose once more, and wish her Ladyship joy. It is extremely rude to be so inattentive on the present joyful occasion.

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It may rather be called unkind perhaps, said Mr. Howard, (smiling, while he

he obeyed her commands) but I have long wished our dear sister from the bottom of my heart the enjoyment of that happiness which I was convinced would one day prove her fate.

Our Hermione has many rivals, said Lady Aubrey. Mrs. Howard, I perceive, is quite enthusiastic about my Lord; and as for myself, though I had his picture faithfully delineated by the most able hand before I beheld him, yet I was quite charmed as well with his appearance as with the superior elegance of his manners and conversation.

Our little party last night was in uncommon spirits, and Fanny quite giddy with mirth. We talked over and over every fancied circumstance of the meeting which must have by this time taken place between the travellers, with an interest that seemed equally to animate the whole party, yet I always feel uneasy on repeating before Lady Aubrey the
name

name of Lord Belmont, often as it has within these few days occurred in the course of conversation. She spoke of him this night herself however with an apparent tranquillity that partly relieved me; and when I attended her as usual to her dressing room after supper, she owned to me, that though the prospect of seeing him agitated her not a little, she felt for him the tender regard of a daughter, and thought of an interview with a sensation of mournful satisfaction that soothed and gratified her. He always demonstrated a peculiar fondness for me, said she, which excited my warmest gratitude; and though an ill founded resentment on my father's part obliged me during his life time wholly to break off all intercourse with the whole family, and after the misfortune of his death I had not courage to think of demanding a visit from the kind old man before I left England, my wounds being then too recent
and

and my feelings unsubdued by time and patience, yet I always remembered him with tenderness; and I flatter myself, after the first meeting is over, I shall derive much satisfaction from a re-union which I have always so anxiously desired. To enlarge the objects of our interest, is in fact to augment the scale of our happiness; and I shall never allow myself to sigh too bitterly for past sorrows, while the present affords me friends that excite my warmest sensibility.

JULY 21.

I have impatiently expected letters from Calais these two days past; Lord Linrose having promised to write the moment he had seen Lord Belmont; but none have arrived; which I own both disappoints and surprizes me.

No

JULY 23.

No letters still. By this time, if no interruption has retarded their journey, Lord Belmont and his grandson might have been arrived in town in their way to Belmont, which is in —shire. But I imagine his Lordship has not travelled with such expedition as he proposed; and probably Lord Linrose did not get up with him so soon as was intended. Lord Belmont's health, though much improved by a salutary climate, is but lately re-established; and I fear the shock of his son's death may have occasioned a relapse. The weather has been so serene that apprehension on the score of their passage would be ridiculous, yet I cannot avoid being uneasy.

Lady



JULY 24.

Lady Aubrey, whose astonishment at the silence of Lord Linrose fully equalled mine, sent her servant yesterday evening to wait the arrival of the post; and while she, Mr. Howard, and my sister, were sat down to *ombre*, my anxiety and impatience led me to steal away to meet the returning messenger. I had strolled towards the great road at the extremity of the park, which is near a mile from the house, before I saw him; and having hastily looked over the letters, perceived with redoubled regret that none were either directed for me or written by the hand of Lord Linrose.

Disappointed and perplexed, I bade the man go forwards; and returning slowly, was ruminating most uncomfortably on the unaccountable cause of this disappointment, when I heard the tramping
ling

ling of horses behind me; and turning round, perceived Lord Linrose on horseback, attended by his servant. I had now got almost within sight of the house. He rode quietly up to me; and instantly dismounting, gave his horse to his servant, and approached me with a mixture of pleasure and uneasiness in his countenance that instantly told me something disagreeable was to follow. He took my hand, and tenderly congratulated me on my improved looks since he had last seen me. But the solemnity with which he spoke alarmed me; and I imagined he had not courage to proceed.

I am afraid, my Lord, said I at length with a forced smile, things have not turned out happily. Lord Belmont I perceive will not acknowledge his grandchildren.

Oh! he is determined and immovable, cried he. He is deaf to my entreaties, and wholly insensible to the voice of nature,

ture, to compassion, to humanity, or even to that cool dispassioned reason which he recommends to me perpetually as the only safe and rational rule of conduct. I have attempted every human method of prevailing, I have exhausted every possible argument of persuasion, and said all that man can say where his last and dearest hopes of bliss are at stake; but oh! he is impenetrable! neither to be softened into pity nor influenced by justice; and he declares himself deliberately resolved on no account whatever either privately to see or publicly to acknowledge his grandchildren. He has even forcibly and absolutely protested—

That we never more must meet, said I steadily, while he hesitated to proceed. Well, my Lord, if such is his resolution, it is your Lordship's duty as well as mine implicitly to submit.

Submit! exclaimed he with warmth, throwing himself passionately at my feet.

No!

No! never, never will I submit to a decision so barbarous, unreasonable, and inhuman. Lord Belmont undoubtedly has a right within certain bounds to prescribe to me *my* conduct, but *I* on my part possess one equally potent to expect from his justice reason and moderation. Wherever in those points he fails, so far he cancels the mutual bonds of obligation and duty that exist between us, and sets me free to act for myself. Had he prohibited a connection which could not have been considered as dishonourable, but merely as mortifying to his views and degrading to his dignity, even in this case had my heart been torn to death I scarce think I could have gratified my own wishes at the expence of torturing him with the disappointment of hopes, which however blindly, have invariably sought my happiness as their ultimate foundation, and I think, Miss Seymour, a short review of my past conduct may convince
you

you of the truth of this assertion; but when, without the slightest grounds for disapprobation, he objects, when he forbids an alliance where every gratification of reason and even of vanity present themselves; when fortune has made you at least my equal, and nature created you ah! how infinitely my superior, these obligations of duty end; Lord Belmont must thank himself for the step he obliges us to take; and we are no longer bound to gratify that caprice which rigorously demands the sacrifice of our whole happiness.

Ah! my Lord, cried I sorrowfully, all this is mere sophistry. The real state of the matter is quite different. Lord Belmont rejects me as his grandchild either by blood or alliance; and never, never will I be prevailed with to grant an independent consent, though my grandfather's behaviour towards me may in your Lordship's opinion set us free from these obligations.

obligations of duty which otherwise he must undoubtedly claim : yet surely you cannot be either ignorant of or insensible to the powerful motives that restrain me. How many painful minutes have the disobedience of his children occasioned to Lord Belmont. Disappointed in his sanguine expectations of their happiness, distracted with the conduct of one son and displeased, however unjustly, with the connection formed by the other, he now finds himself deprived for ever of both, and seeks in his grandson the completion of those expectations which have hitherto proved only a source of vexation, uneasiness, and mortification to his bosom. Oh! my Lord! ought we to render this unfortunate old man still more miserable? ought we to blast his last hopes, and teach him that while he had the generosity to place his happiness in the prosperity of his children, however blindly he judged of the means, disappointment

pointment and ingratitude were all the return they afforded him.

Ah! Miss Seymour! in what a light you place Lord Belmont's conduct! But pray listen, I entreat you, with equal patience and attention, to a fair and candid examination of the matter from me. Let not a romantic generosity warp your judgment and banish your compassion where it ought more naturally to exert itself. Great, I allow, would be the weight of your arguments, were Lord Belmont's misery the natural consequence of our happiness; but this is so far from being the real case, that the most certain comfort and most assured satisfaction must flow from his being a witness of our mutual felicity, where no one obstacle, but those of caprice and prepossession are alledged. How is it to be reasonably supposed they will rest on his mind, when all hope of another alliance, which at present supports his inflexibility, is wholly
and

and for ever suppress. No ; be assured my grandfather's eyes will then be opened to his error ; with the most sincere regret he will abjure his own, and pardon ours, and taking my Hermione to his bosom, will experience in her duty and affection, and in the enjoyment he must derive from my unspeakable felicity, all the comfort, happiness, and delight, of which, by a false generosity and ill judged adherence to the rigors of duty, you would wholly deprive him in his old days.

Ah ! my Lord ! cried I, softened at this soothing representation, and terrified at my own weakness, I have listened too long. I can hear no more. It grows late. I hastened on ; but Lord Linrose persisted in detaining me, and seizing my hand, implored me for the sake of heaven to think on what he had urged.

No, cried I, I must think of it no more. But tell me, what said Lord Belmont

mont ? of what did he accuse us ? what excuse did he offer for this cruel prepossession ?

None. When I entered on the subject, I found him thoroughly well informed, and to all appearance even prepared for my application. Linrose, said he, I know what you are going to propose : but let me save you the fatigue of intreaties that are fruitless, and the pain of hopes that must be succeeded by disappointment. The young women for whom you interceed, be assured I never will acknowledge. I have my own reasons for this conduct—reasons which, accountable to none, shall die in my own breast. But hear my final determination on this head : if you trifle with my resentment, and dare form a connexion so repugnant to my wishes, I solemnly declare——
But why should I repeat to you a denunciation evidently the consequence of some secret prepossession, fostered heaven knows
how,

how, but which is rooted so deeply in his mind, that some inhuman, officious hand I am convinced still supports the prejudice it has originally implanted.

What secret enemy has done us an injury so irreparable I have not yet been able to discover. My Lord would not even hear me on the subject; and when I seriously insisted, that as your only surviving parent he was bound in honour to afford you his countenance and protection, or to satisfy you and the world why both were withheld, he told me with an indignant smile that his motives would exculpate his conduct both to the world and to his own heart. I perceived, I replied, that he laboured under the injurious mistake which had for some time, owing to a variety of circumstances that a few moments could explain, prevailed to your disadvantage, and instantly entered on the several points that had so unfortunately led to this idea.

VOL IV.

I

He

He listened in contemptuous silence. I am perfectly satisfied, said he ironically, as to the conduct of the young ladies. I accuse them of nothing: but I absolutely desire that I may hear nothing further on a subject that fatigues me, and which entirely embitters the enjoyment I had vainly flattered myself this meeting would have given me.

This conversation took place during the evening on which we met at Calais; and next day, while we travelled from Dover to town, I renewed the subject, and endeavoured to work on his Lordship's feelings, finding all attempts to convince his reason unsuccessful. An accident however occurred, which all the malice of ill fortune could not have introduced at a more unlucky moment. We encountered Lord Mortonbury at the stage where we dined, and he easily persuaded my Lord to spend a few days at his country seat, which lies in our way

to

to Belmont. A rencontre so ill fated could scarce have happened. The sight of his old friend could not fail to strengthen and augment his Lordship's obduracy, and confirm his determination in favour of an alliance that has so long been his favourite wish. For some time therefore I carefully avoided exciting his resentment by touching on a topic, which I perceived, from some disagreeable hints he occasionally let fall, would now be listened to with less temper than ever.

In this state, to write to you was impossible. I could tell you nothing but what I wished eternally to forget, and I could only have made you a sharer in the uneasiness that weighed down my own spirits. Teazed and worn out, I could no longer support with patience the miserable uncertainty of my situation, and at length ventured to risk a renewal of this topic of contention. I began by imprudently assuring his Lordship that my

I 2

resolutions

resolutions in regard to Lady Elizabeth were fixed and unalterable. My ill judged warmth provoked and exasperated him; and I found, that instead of gaining ground, my arguments were received with augmented displeasure, and if possible with more determined repugnance than before.

Convinced that all hopes of prevailing were at an end, I then determined to contrive an escape for one day, which the pretext of visiting a friend who resides in this county easily afforded me; and to endeavour if possible to reconcile you to a step, which, however alarming on the first view, be assured, loveliest Hermione, presents no real danger. You determine before you have fairly weighed and considered the circumstances of the case. You are scared with the notion of disobedience, ere you reflect that from you Lord Belmont claims no duty; and the idea of a private marriage shocks you

as

as an indelicacy and terrifies you as daring, merely because you have been accustomed to regard it in that light, without reflecting on the singularity of your situation, and the satisfaction which must result even to Lord Belmont from this temporary disappointment. We leave Morton Hall to-morrow evening; at which place I must by that time be, in order to accompany my grandfather to Belmont, where he has some business to settle previous to a visit he means to pay my mother in Northamptonshire. But oh! Miss Seymour, with what alacrity, with what delight shall I return to him, if you will but raise me from this state of despair, if you will but animate me to life and hope, and generously promise to be mine, without an approbation that is not to be obtained.

We had now reached the house, and it began to be very late. Stay but for an instant, cried he, and relieve me from this agony of uncertainty.

I 3

No,

No, no, cried I, pulling away my hand, I must listen no longer, I must hear no more; and entering the hall, I ran up to my own apartment in spite of all his efforts to detain me.

Oh! Sophia! I carried thither all the insinuating arguments to which I had been attending with so much irresolution; and I found, that while my judgment remained unconvinced, and my delicacy revolted at the idea of a clandestine connexion, so contrary to that open dignity of conduct which I had flattered myself with the hope of supporting invariably thro' life, my heart died within me at the cruel sacrifice I made to principle. Even self applause sustained not my spirits. Pride was subdued by softness; and I found that one moment longer would have given to Lord Linrose all he wished.

Involvement in this mist of passion, I yet began at length to perceive how providential

dential was that escape which at first I had almost regretted ; and I considered, with a thankfulness that half bordered on satisfaction, what mortification must have ever attended the recollection of a step which I could not but have considered as derogatory to the character I have ever wished and endeavoured to maintain.

This idea somewhat consoled me ; and resolving to struggle with feelings which I could not in private indulge without in a great measure betraying them to Lord Linrose, and rendering them obvious to the rest of the family, I forced myself into seeming composure, and went down stairs.

Lady Aubrey and my sister were together: Mr. Howard, I found, had been sent for to another room to Lord Linrose, of whose arrival they were yet ignorant. I had the disagreeable task therefore of disclosing to them the scene that had just taken place. Poor Fanny's chagrin kept

pace with her late exultation, and Lady Aubrey's countenance was clouded with the most friendly disappointment.

Who can be such a fiend, cried Fanny, as to persecute us in this cruel manner without the slightest provocation? who upon the face of the earth can find either interest or pleasure in blasting our reputations, and persuading Lord Belmont that we are unworthy of his regard? and who could possibly have dreamt that he would have proved thus obstinate and determined, when all the rest of the family are now our friends; when even Lady Linrose herself professes to love us, and wishes to see us reinstated in his favour.

So her Ladyship is pleased to say, cried I; but from what Lord Linrose let fall this evening, I think there is great reason to suspect that her wishes have a very contrary direction. From her representation only can Lord Belmont have imbibed

bibed the prepossessions that retain such fast hold on his mind, since from no other person could he possibly have received intelligence concerning us.

I should be sorry, said Lady Aubrey, to accuse Lady Linrose, or to suspect her of a conduct below her character; but I own I have had my doubts of her on this occasion from the beginning. Her motives, tho' mean and despicable, are sufficiently obvious, and I have been told by my aunt, Lady Meredith, that she is a woman of a very unamiable character, and generally disliked.

The entrance of Lord Linrose and Mr. Howard prevented her proceeding. The former was visibly depressed; and appeared to exert himself to converse upon the indifferent topics which ensued, but which were very languidly discussed by the company during the whole evening.

Supper was soon after announced; and being seated by him at table, he intreated

me in a low voice to give him an opportunity for one half hour's conversation before he left us, which must be early in the morning.

I told him steadily that he must not expect me to listen to a repetition of arguments, which without Lord Belmont's sanction could lead to nothing. If any favourable moment occurs, said I, in which you can flatter yourself with the hope of setting your plans in such a point of view as will obtain my Lord's approbation, I believe your Lordship hardly doubts of mine. But why should you even wish to soften me into a compliance which, wanting the concurrence of my reason, and wholly opposite to my ideas of propriety, would but lower me in my own estimation, and render me too unhappy to enable me to——

I was afraid of my voice, and ventured not to proceed. Lord Linrose prest my hand unobserved, and whispered a thousand

sand expressions of gratitude and acquiescence. At least, said he, I promise to acquiesce till every possible source of trial has been attempted in vain. In the mean time, you cannot surely have the barbarity to refuse allowing me to correspond with you. To this request I can take no denial.

I agreed for the present to the proposal because I could not prevail with myself to refuse *all* he asked; but I am much afraid even this is an indulgence that must soon be relinquished.

When we separated for the night, Lady Aubrey remained some time behind in conversation with my Lord and Mr. Howard. His Lordship used every argument to prevail with them to approve of an immediate marriage; and mentioned the fortune he inherited from Sir Thomas Roatsley, which secured him a competency; all, he was certain, for which I would be solicitous till a reconciliation

ciliation with Lord Belmont took place. But Lady Aubrey told him, that tho', had such been the result of my deliberations, she should not have opposed a measure which undoubtedly, from the peculiarity of our situation, afforded some excuse, yet she would not advise what she could not approve, and on the contrary must ever admire the steadiness of my resolution, which having it's foundation in delicacy and principle, whatever was the anguish it occasioned me, she was convinced I would strictly adhere to.

Ah! my dear Madam! cried I, penetrated with shame while she repeated to me this part of their conversation, steadily will I adhere to this resolution, since it is sanctioned with your applause. But much anguish has it occasioned to my heart, and much I fear your opinion of my heroism would be infinitely diminished, did you know how near I was incurring your contempt by yielding to my Lord's wishes.

My

My contempt, my dearest Hermione ? Be assured that is a sentiment my heart never can feel for you. Had you given way to the solicitations of your lover, believe me I should have soothed and comforted instead of condemning you. I wish you to assume the heroine to Lord Linrose ; but I am far from either desiring or expecting you to appear one to me. On the contrary, I think I should love you less 'were you different in any point from what I find you.

Oh ! Sophia ! ought not the affection of this beloved friend to console me for every disappointment.

JULY 30.

I received this day the following letter from Lord Linrose.

TO MISS SEYMOUR.

How shall I summon resolution to acknowledge to the loveliest of women,
that

that my sole hope of becoming the happiest and most envied of men, rests on a plan, the mention of which I tremble to remember shocked and startled her so severely. Lord Belmont, I am unwillingly constrained to own, is more determined, more infatuated if possible than ever; and without dwelling on ungrateful particulars, I am forced to tell you, that of any alteration in his present sentiments I dare no longer entertain the slightest hope.

But is it the necessary consequence of Lord Belmont's inflexibility, that I must be doomed to unmitigated misery, and you be rendered unhappy? And why ought we to prove a sacrifice to caprice, where not one reasonable obstacle obstructs our union? no duty surely is owing to that parent who denies the title and disowns all claim to obedience. Yet if you will persist in regarding him in that sacred light, give him, I intreat, the

most

most lively proof of your affection: oblige him in his own despite. Make me the happiest of mankind; and gratify the first wish of the old man's heart, by allowing him to witness the unspeakable felicity which you and you only can confer upon his grandson.

In regard to fortune, I am convinced you are by no means apprehensive. Mine, independent of my grandfather, were Hermione to share it with me, would surpass my own wishes, and I am convinced satisfy hers. The motive of her resistance, I am certain, is too generous to allow for a moment of such considerations. She trembles to wound a heart that has so long and so severely bled; but be assured you will heal instead of augment his sorrows—you will sooth instead of torture his bosom, you will console him for all he has suffered, and a momentary disappointment will be succeeded by unceasing consolation.

I have

I have more than once founded my Lord as to the secret author of this prepossession, which, without the assistance of some intermeddling slanderous tongue, never could have found its way into his mind; but on this subject his caution baffles all my penetration. I even began most unjustly to accuse my mother, as the only person on whom I could contrive to rest my suspicions with any shadow of probability; but I now heartily repent the injurious idea which induced me to write her upon the subject with much acrimony, for my heart was too much tortured either to express myself with calmness or to think with reason. She had the goodness however to pardon my impetuosity; and condescended to account for her behaviour in a manner that made me blush for my own.

Revolve, lovely Hermione, for the sake of heaven revolve, I entreat, on all I have said. We are still at Morton
Hall;

Hall; my grandfather having been confined with a slight fit of the gout, which will probably detain him some days longer. Consider the reason, the justice, the perfect propriety, nay the duty and humanity of the scheme I propose, and favour me with one propitious line, to alleviate the distress of your eternally grateful and obedient servant,

LINROSE.

JULY 28.

The perusal of this letter has indeed plunged me into a sea of troubles; and, on the first reading, I thought only of acceding to Lord Linrose's proposal. I considered nothing but the sad alternative, either of hazarding every inconvenience and yielding at once to his entreaties, or of relinquishing him for ever. I forgot the repugnance of my own heart to a measure so bold and so dangerous, and which recurred with painful force
the

the instant the perturbation of my mind began to abate. I remembered not the applause which had in my cool moments attended my former refusal, nor the consolation which I had derived from that of my dear and ever respected Lady Aubrey, whose approbation of my conduct is essential to my peace. I considered not the peculiar situation of Lord Linrose; whose rank in the world, and habits of living must, with the best disposition in the world, render him particularly unfit for the circumscribed œconomy and seclusion of which his own independent fortune would admit. Mr. Howard tells me it does not exceed five or six hundred a year; and to this limited income, which I make no doubt has hardly hitherto served for the little incidental charges of pocket money, Lord Linrose would be forced to submit probably during the life time of Lord Belmont, for as to the hopes of softening him

him into forgiveness, even Lady Aubrey, it is easy to perceive, builds little on that circumstance.

Stern and unrelenting when once thoroughly exasperated, it is infinitely more probable, she says, that submission and time may soften him in our favour than that he should ever be prevailed with to pardon an act of open defiance. The very idea that Lord Linrose, from now considering himself as the sole and natural heir of his title and wealth, may with less apprehension dare to brave his displeasure, is a circumstance the most likely to induce him to let his grandson feel the whole weight of his indignation in every way he can devise, and as long as he lives to punish his disobedience.

Some of the most prudent of these considerations you will suspect, Sophia, were not wholly the suggestions of my own mind. At least at first, though my reason could not but entirely acquiesce
with

with the force, justice, and probability of all those conclusions, the moment they either occurred to myself or were suggested to me by the apprehensive tenderness of my dear Lady Aubrey, that difficulty which had impressed me with the least alarm became, from her prudent representation, the motive that weighed the most forcibly against my compliance. The idea of involving Lord Linrose perhaps for a period of years, (for Lord Belmont, though advanced in life, may survive a long time) in all the inconveniences of a narrow fortune, for which he must be so peculiarly ill calculated, is a measure I find I could not summon resolution to hazard.

I have therefore written to him. I have desired him to think of me no more till his proposals are authorized by Lord Belmont's consent. But I believe I have not been able to conceal the poignant regret with which I make the sacrifice;

sacrifice; and indeed if it will serve to soften his disappointment, I wish not to deny how deeply I partake in the sufferings I am constrained to inflict.

AUGUST I.

With what infinite tenderness and sympathy Lady Aubrey enters into all my feelings on this occasion. She soothes my uneasiness, with a pity that draws my confidence and claims my warmest gratitude. I no longer conceal from her the regret I experience in giving pain to Lord Linrose, and disappointing his hopes. I even confess it to her with an ease that lulls my distress and fortifies my mind.

My sister's gaiety has quite deserted her, since this sad reverse took place. Mr. Howard too must naturally experience some personal disappointment.

The

The advantages resulting from a reconciliation with Lord Belmont are of no trifling importance to the interests of an encreasing family. But I doubt if Fanny carries her ideas so far. Her mortification is merely excited by her feelings for mine and that regret which it is natural to suffer on being forced finally to relinquish a favourite prospect that has been long and fondly cherished.

AUGUST 2.

I exert myself to appear chearful tho' the means by which I support my seeming heroism but prepares me perhaps for fresh uneasiness. I cannot help secretly flattering myself that if an interview were by any means to take place between Lady Aubrey and Lord Belmont, she might with some probability of success undertake our defence, and extirpate those

those deep-rooted prejudices that have been productive of consequences so unhappy. Such a proposal, however, it is impossible for me to suggest; particularly as she now never mentions any intention of soliciting a renewal of Lord Belmont's acquaintance, and seems to have merely regarded that measure as the necessary result of the connection between them which my marriage must have produced. This I own surprises me; but I suppose her courage having failed her as the moment seemed approaching, she hardly regrets a satisfaction which must have been purchased at the price of so much agitation and apprehension.

I think continually in what manner and with what sensations Lord Linrose has received my letter. I suppose I shall have his answer to-morrow or next day. I sincerely hope he will resign himself to my determination without any further solicitations.

solicitations. I tremble lest he should take the resolution of coming again hither.

This evening's post brought me my dear, dear Sophia's delightful packet, which has given me more pleasure than I thought it possible I could have tasted in the present state of my spirits. Oh what infinite comfort does the hopes, however distant, of one day embracing you infuse into my heart. I think I ought not to complain of any calamity when heaven promises me a consolation so powerful towards soothing every painful regret. This idea not only heals my uneasiness, but inspires me with resolution to struggle against it. I am infinitely more resigned since your letter arrived. Two others accompanied it, which I should hardly have thought of mentioning did not one of them contain a piece of intelligence at which I cannot but feel sincere pleasure: it is from Miss Parsons, who

who informs me that she is in a few weeks to give her hand to a gentleman who has lately paid her his addresses: he is a clergyman, a middle aged man, she tells me, possessed of an excellent character, and a good living. My sister and I are much pleased to find that a settlement so fortunate and so comfortable at last puts a final period to poor Miss Jenny's mortifications and difficulties; for by some hints in her letter I suspect that her situation in Lady Linrose's family was by no means so comfortable as she at first expected. There is a paragraph towards the end that strongly corroborates our suspicions of that lady's duplicity. It is as follows.

“ I suppose you are not ignorant that Lord Belmont is returned to England. Heaven grant that you and your amiable sister may derive the satisfaction from that event that my heart wishes you. He is most impatiently expected here by

her Ladyship, whose anxiety to see him would have carried her to meet him in town had he not prevented her by spending some time with my Lord Mortonsbury. I fear much, my dear Miss Seymour, that you entrusted not your cause to an unprejudiced advocate when you expected Lady Linrose would mediate in your favour with his Lordship. I have never presumed to repeat even your names in her presence till the other morning, when a gentleman of this neighbourhood, who saw you in town, happening in the course of conversation to mention the superior elegance of your appearance with many just encomiums, her Ladyship spoke of you with an indignant disrespect that astonished and shocked me. I could no longer attend in silence to so much injustice, and defended you with a warmth that ended in a rupture between us. My approaching marriage, however, renders this a circumstance

cumstance wholly immaterial, as my dear little charge is my only regret on quitting the family; and I am at present at the house of a friend, where I shall remain till I remove to that of Mr. Price."

This intelligence does not surprise me; neither, since it proves no material inconvenience to Miss Parsons, does the discovery displease me: for the disgust which has been implanted by misrepresentation and jealousy is infinitely less formidable than that which might have been the result of inherent obstinacy and caprice.

The other epistle is from Mrs. Hindon, who is returned from her expedition to Holland.

AUGUST 3.

Read, my beloved Sophia, read and participate in the happy revolution which

K 2

this

this day, this propitious day has produced. I shall endeavour to inform you of the particulars with all the composure I can summon to my aid.

My sister having been yesterday a little indisposed, Lady Aubrey proposed taking her for an airing this morning immediately after breakfast, and entreated me to accompany them; but I excused myself on pretence of finishing a packet to my Sophia, which really was my intention. My spirits however were particularly languid, and being left to my own meditations, I found myself unfit for writing. I seated myself therefore on the window seat, listless and inactive, and was revolving in my mind, among other subjects of uneasiness, the implicit submission and silence with which Lord Linrose had received my letter, when this reverie was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a chariot and four, which drove full speed up the
avenue;

avenue; and while I was thinking with regret who this unwelcome visitor could be, the door of the parlour opened and a servant announced Lord Linrose.

My own perturbation, unspeakable as it was, did not conceal from me the agitation that struggled in his countenance; but my apprehension and astonishment on so unexpectedly beholding him, prevented me from discovering whether it was grief or pleasure that occasioned the hurry and emotion visible in every feature. Hermione! Miss Seymour! cried he, and seizing my hand, which he passionately kissed—Lovely and beloved Hermione, I come at last to claim you. Pronounce my happiness. Tell me at once you will be mine: for now Lord Belmont no longer withholds his consent to my wishes. His warmest approbation, his most fervent concurrence attends it, and he sends you by me this

tender embrace and the paternal blessing of his heart.

Oh! Sophia! what were at this moment my sensations. Doubt, joy, and astonishment, all at once overpowering my senses; my eyes closed; I became insensible; and leaned unconsciously on Lord Linrose's shoulder; while apprehension rendered him almost incapable of supporting or of assisting me; and he waited my recovery, which was instantaneous, in fearful silence.

The moment my senses were restored, he poured upon me so many grateful acknowledgments for this proof of my sensibility, and accused himself so bitterly of imprudence in having so suddenly informed me of this surprising event, that I blushed for the weakness I had betrayed, and besought him to talk of it no more, but to inform me to what we owed this change in Lord Belmont's sentiments.

To

To that angel of heaven, Lady Aubrey, cried he. It is she who has opened Lord Belmont's eyes to his infatuation and injustice. It is she who has justified your character in his good opinion, and effected this happy revolution in his mind. That *she* alone could have produced a change so sudden and so wonderful, he even himself acknowledges, while he obstinately persists in concealing the name of the person who has infused, like poison, the most injurious falsehoods into his imagination.

Whoever has done us this injury, cried I, I for my own part heartily forgive them; and I earnestly entreat, as a proof of the truth of the professions you have so repeatedly made me, that the recollection of it may never be the subject of the slightest resentment. Oh! banish, I beseech you, my Lord, banish all disagreeable suspicions, and every angry reflection from your thoughts, and

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think only of what we owe to heaven and Lady Aubrey.

To this conciliating request, said my Lord, I certainly should not hesitate to promise implicit obedience; but I will not assume merit with you on account of a compliance which Lord Belmont, dreading the consequences of indignation so justly excited, has already exacted. The anxiety with which he laid his commands on me never to make this transaction a foundation either for investigation or retaliation convinced me at once—that I must indeed enquire no farther—though never will it be in my power in future to honour or esteem—

Hold for heaven's sake! cried I, frightened at the vehemence with which he spoke, you already infringe your promise. Oh! think not of displeasure; but tell me what means Lady Aubrey employed to produce this wonderful change.

My

My Lord then put into my hands an open letter, which he took from his letter case. Here, cried he, is the invaluable performance, that has wrought with the force of magic, and not only poured conviction on Lord Belmont's mind, for that indeed is a point which time must naturally have of course effected, but with miraculous power has at once removed all those barriers of prejudice and repugnance that have obstructed my happiness.

I instantly began to peruse it; but the first lines affected me so violently, that I was unable to proceed; and my Lord insisted I should give over the attempt till I was less agitated. I would then have made my escape in order to recover some degree of composure; but he would not suffer me to withdraw, and detained me by relating the effect this pathetic letter had produced on Lord Belmont.

Lord Linrose said he was not present when the letter was presented to Lord Belmont; but having been an airing on horseback, a servant who watched his return informed him that my Lord desired to see him in his apartment.

On entering the chamber, he found his Lordship alone and much agitated. His features, on attempting to speak, seemed almost convulsed, from the effort of suppressing his tears, which at length forced their way down his cheek. Lord Linrose hastily enquired the cause of his emotion, but for some moments he was unable to explain it. Linrose, said he at last, be not alarmed. Read that letter. It was sufficiently explanatory, and hardly was it finished when Lord Linrose found himself in his grandfather's arms. I blame myself severely, said he; but I have been deceived and misled in a most ungenerous manner. I ought not however

ver to have given implicit credit ; but I will endeavour to atone for the injustice of my past conduct to these unfriended and neglected children, for whom you have so often interceded in vain.

I know, cried Lord Linrose, hastily firing at a suspicion which he had so often dismissed with much self accusation, it is my mother who has been secretly at the bottom of this affair ; and I solemnly swear——

He was proceeding, he owns, in a strain equally violent and improper, when Lord Belmont suddenly stopt him ; and without absolutely either affirming or denying the justice of the charge, told him that if he would not instantly give him his promise in the most sacred manner never to attempt by any means to search into the grounds of his behaviour, and whatever were his own private suspicions never to dare to resent it, his eternal displeasure should be the inevitable conse-

consequence: on the contrary, said he, if I find you disposed to oblige me in this particular, I shall obstruct your wishes no more.

Intoxicated with joy, I instantly bound myself by the most solemn vow, said Lord Linrose, conscientiously to adhere to this command. Lord Belmont had indeed taken a method so effectual for subduing my displeasure, that three words from his lips had wholly banished it from my memory, and threw me into an extacy of spirits that made me in charity with all mankind.

Lady Aubrey, said Lord Belmont, again melting at the recollections that crowded on his mind, the amiable Lady Aubrey could make me no request with which I should not think myself bound to comply; and I consider it as a singular felicity that I possess the ability of gratifying the wishes of the most benevolent of female hearts, which, thro' my
family

family was in the early pride of youth and beauty torn with distraction and lost to the world. I loved and admired her with the tender partiality of a parent ; and the circumstance of her having afforded my granddaughters that friendship and protection which were denied them from a more natural quarter, convinces me they must be deserving of the warm interest she feels for them, and elevates her higher than ever in my estimation and regard.

Finding we were at Aubrey Castle, Lord Belmont willingly consented to allow Lord Linrose to set off early this morning, after a short apology to Lord Mortonbury, which was afterwards to be followed by a fuller explanation ; and having written an answer to Lady Aubrey's letter, to be presented by his grandson, promised to join him at this place on Wednesday next.

Lord Linrose having finished his relation,

tion, at length permitted me to retire for a few moments to read the propitious letter which had effected such miracles, and gave me Lord Belmont's answer to present to Lady Aubrey on her return from her airing. Here is a faithful copy of the former.

TO THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF BELMONT.

After a tedious space of sixteen mournful years, will Lord Belmont allow a long forgotten friend to enquire, if time has wholly erased from his remembrance her whom once he honoured with the name of *daughter*; who once valued herself on possessing a distinguished place in his esteem and in his affections, and who has cherished towards him, amidst the pangs of misery and the languor of a distant and melancholy solitude, that tender duty and filial regard, which, connected with a thousand agonizing recollections, never can be effaced from her heart. Yes, my Lord, after a dismal lapse of time,
memory

memory recalls your kindness, your paternal caresses, with a gratitude and chastened pleasure scarce inferior to that which they excited when I was indeed your child; and one of the most fervent wishes of my heart is, to be allowed to think I have a father, and gratified with the permission of asking on my knees his blessing.

That heart, my Lord, which, worn out with suffering and subdued by sorrow, looked around the universe and beheld no single remaining source of hope and consolation, has lately discovered, by the mercy of a gracious providence, one little spot of rest, one prop of support, that tells me I have not been bereft of all; and which bids me be grateful and resigned. The Almighty has vouchsafed me a tender bond of union, that binds me to life and connects me with mankind: He has granted me the tender interest of parental fondness, which with divine influence

fluence heals the corroding remembrance of his less gracious dispensations, and presents me with a ray of satisfaction even in this world. Heaven has sent me two lovely and beloved daughters, dear to my soul and unrivalled in my admiration, and who claim the enthusiastic adoration of a parent's heart: yet by *him* alone, who enjoys a right to that sacred title, they are abandoned and disowned; to him the same healing benefit is offered; but he disdains its acceptance, he rejects the soothing comfort, and will not lay hold of those alleviations which a pitying Providence bestows.

What hidden and mysterious cause! what unaccountable and unmerited prepossessions, have banished the warm benevolence and milled the rectitude that formed the ruling principles of Lord Belmont's character? Ah! my Lord! whatever secret and malevolent enemy has poisoned your mind with doubts and prejudices,

judices, be assured they have not the slightest foundation in truth. Some selfish and ungenerous motive must have prompted these misrepresentations. Give not credit to so base a lie. Consent but to behold your innocent, your amiable grandchildren, and every suspicion will be refuted, all mediation useless, and persuasion at an end. Subdued and enchanted, you will take them to your paternal bosom, you will desire to attach them to you by still closer ties, by the spontaneous bonds of gratitude and obligation. You will love them with the fondness of a father: you will love them perhaps *as I love them*: and their unremitting and affectionate duty will give additional interest to your existence, as it constitutes the sole blessing of mine.

The youngest of these valuable young women, has already disposed of her hand to a gentleman of singular worth, but whose fortune equals not his merit. The
eldest,

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eldest, whose charms are of the most insinuating nature, beautiful and enchanting as an angel, unites with the most acute sensibility that disinterested generosity and high sense of honor, in which genuine virtue consists. Adoring and adored by her cousin Lord Linrose, she heroically prefers the tranquillity of the parent who rejects her, and whose misguided prepossessions she must ever deplore, to the certain happiness it was in her option to have enjoyed; and what, alas! required tenfold fortitude——which it was in her power to have conferred.

Will you, my Lord, allow a sacrifice like this to remain unrewarded? Will you permit two amiable young people to continue disappointed and unhappy, who but for a just sense of filial piety would have been blessed in each other? Ah! no! your Lordship requires but the film that blinded you to be taken from your eyes, and I feel that I have already prevailed.

vailed. You will no longer deny yourself the delight of participating in the felicity you are enabled to bestow, and your generous mind will experience satisfaction in affording a lively sensation of pleasure, to her whose heart has so long bled for and now deeply partakes in the sufferings of her young friends, but who shall ever remain, with implicit submission and the warmest regard,

Your Lordship's affectionate daughter
and obedient servant,

JULIA AUBREY.

AUBREY CASTLE, AUG. 2.

I was not recovered from the emotion into which the perusal of this affecting letter had thrown me, when I heard Lady Aubrey's foot on the stairs, followed by my sister. Eager to inform them of what had taken place since the morning, I flew to the door just as they were passing in order to enter the adjoining drawing room; and incapable at that moment
either

either of calmly explaining the cause of my perturbation or of conquering its violence, I threw myself into the arms of the dear friend to whom I owed so much, and sobbed upon her neck without being able to utter one word.

Fanny was terrified, and Lady Aubrey for an instant astonished and alarmed : but her own letter, which I held open in my hand, and the knowledge of Lord Linrose's arrival, which she had learnt below, soon relieved her fears and told her what I was unable to express.

Lord Belmont has then yielded, my love, has he not ? cried she, warmly returning my embraces. Oh ! I hoped much from the generous benevolence of that worthy man's disposition. It was the apprehension of retaining you in a painful state of suspense, which I could not be *certain* would not have been succeeded by disappointment, prevented me from acquainting you with this last and fortunate

nate attempt to soften him in your favour till I was informed of it's success.

Fanny was in extacies, and wept and laughed by turns; but soon growing more composed, I delivered to Lady Aubrey the letter from Lord Belmont.

She seemed much affected even with the sight of the writing. Her hand shook violently on receiving it from me, and she instantly retired with it into her own chamber. Fanny then left me, to congratulate Lord Linrose, whom she was impatient to see; but I found it impossible to taste satisfaction while my ever dear Lady Aubrey's generous participation in my happiness was damped with so much pain, and mingled with so many contending feelings. I ventured not for some time to intrude on her retirement; but at length apprehension carried me to the door of her apartment, where I overheard her weeping with so much anguish that I took courage to make an attempt
to

to enter. It was fastened on the inside however, and I withdrew in respectful silence.

Short was this indulgence of sorrow. In half an hour she joined me with a placid and composed countenance, and having once more embraced and congratulated me, gave me Lord Belmont's letter to peruse, and went to welcome Lord Linrose.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE COUNTESS OF
AUBREY.

MY DEAR MADAM,

Be assured it is in the power neither of time nor absence to diminish that warm affection, which, founded on the highest esteem and admiration, never while life and reason holds can be weakened in my bosom. The letter you have honoured me with has but augmented the enthusiastic regard with which every tender recollection of Lady Aubrey has ever been
accom-

accompanied; and the humane and benevolent application it contains, while it gratifies my most anxious wish in affording me an opportunity of obliging her, leaves only this painful regret on my mind, that from credulity and remission I have allowed such an application to be made. To acknowledge and to protect these helpless young women, was the undoubted duty of a parent, and a duty, which, but for the misrepresentations of a secret enemy, should have been long ere now conscientiously discharged. But *to bind them to me by still closer ties*, to allow of an alliance with my grandson, the source of my dearest hopes and expectations, to dismiss the prospect of a long cherished scheme, which must have secured to him connections of unbounded interest and importance, is a concession which Lady Aubrey alone could have procured—a revolution, that she of the whole world only could have effected.

When

When her enlarged and generous mind teaches me a lesson so noble, prejudice is subdued, and that repugnance which aided my credulity, vanishes and is forgotten.

My grandson desires the honour of delivering this letter. He carries my blessing to all my children, accompanied with a request that I may be allowed to embrace them on Wednesday. Among the number, more numerous than I ever expected to behold them, none claims a warmer sentiment of pleasure at meeting than that beloved and esteemed daughter to whom I have the unspeakable satisfaction and the honor of subscribing myself,

her affectionate father and

most obedient servant,

BELMONT.

MORTON HALL, AUG. 3.

Lady Aubrey returned just as I had done reading this kind epistle, telling me
that

that Lord Linrose was reproaching me for having deserted the company.

On joining it, the traces of tears were still visible on my countenance, and the consciousness of my betrayed emotions made me enter the drawing room with a degree of timidity. My Lord and Mr. Howard smiled affectionately on approaching me. I believe, cried the latter, my congratulations were rather premature some time ago, but I hope I may repeat them now with all safety. I am not a little vain, added he, turning aside to Lord Linrose, of my talent of prescience, for I foresaw this happy event, and no obstacles or difficulties have been able to convince me that it would not one day take place.

AUGUST 4.

When we parted last night, Lord Linrose made me promise to walk out with

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him

him this morning before breakfast. You know I generally rise early ; and to-day I was not particularly late. We had a delightful walk, and a long and most interesting conversation before any of the family were stirring.

Lady Aubrey seems much agitated with the thoughts of to-morrow's interview. It appears formidable even to me; but to her—ah ! how much more painful must it prove ! She has been very thoughtful all this day ; and I observed often endeavoured to suppress a starting tear, by covering it with a smile that but half performed it's duty. Were the first meeting over, I cannot help flattering myself that custom will soon banish the painful reflexions with which the sight of Lord Belmont cannot fail to be attended, and that lenient consequences will flow from this re-union, so soothing and salutary to the tender and gentle nature of this amiable woman.

H. SEYMOUR.

LETTER XXV.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

AUGUST 6.

THIS interview, so anxiously and so long desired, took place yesterday.

Lady Aubrey's eyes, at breakfast, betrayed how the night had been passed; and as for myself, I felt as if I was on the eve of an event, the consequences of which were formidable and precarious. Fanny seemed to partake very little in these apprehensions. All her anxiety was in regard to my appearance, which she wished to render as agreeable as possible in my grandfather's eyes, as an apology for the imprudence of Lord Linrose's

attachment; and she helped to adjust my dress with an eager anxiety that my uneasiness on Lady Aubrey's account hardly rendered me capable of attending to.

My Lord and Mr. Howard had agreed to ride out, that they might not be in the way when Lord Belmont was introduced to us; and about one his Lordship arrived, having slept on the road, and travelled slowly.

My sister and I trembled to leave Lady Aubrey in that state of agitation into which even the sight of his carriage at a distance had thrown her; but we obeyed the hint she gave us to allow her to receive him alone; and having made her swallow a few drops in water, we withdrew into the adjoining library, which is separated from her dressing room only by a thin partition.

We had scarce time to enter it, when the sound of steps ascending the stairs threw me into a tremor not to be conceived.

ceived. The door of the dressing room was presently after thrown open, and a servant pronounced the name of Lord Belmont and instantly withdrew.

A short silence ensued, which terrified me with the apprehension of Lady Aubrey's having fainted. This alarm was but too soon confirmed, from hearing Lord Belmont call out, in a voice of hurry and afright—Who's there? Good God, who's there? and the bell was instantly rung with great violence.

My sister and I, overpowered with terror and forgetful of every thing but our dear and invaluable friend, then burst into the room. She had sunk upon the sofa, and lay insensible, Lord Belmont hanging over her in all the despair of conscious inability to afford her assistance.

What a moment, in which for the first time to behold our grandfather. Anxiously as I had expected this interview, and formidable as it had appeared,

I scarce regarded him; I almost forgot he was present; and flying to Lady Aubrey, I supported her head in my trembling arms, while Fanny and the maid, who had been summoned from below, administered salts and besprinkled her face with lavender water.

Seeing her beginning to recover, my sister had the presence of mind to send away the maid, and Lady Aubrey soon after opened her lovely eyes. Returning recollection made her feebly raise her head, as if to seek Lord Belmont, who had prudently withdrawn behind from the fear that beholding him again too suddenly might occasion a relapse. But her emotions fortunately now took a less alarming turn; and clasping me in her arms as she reclined upon my neck, the fullness of her heart got vent in tears and sobs that seemed to rend her bosom; while the conflict of my feelings was so dreadful, that I cannot conceive how my senses

senses stood the shock they sustained at that instant.

Lord Belmont, extremely affected, had moved towards us ; but apprehensive of encreasing the violence of Lady Aubrey's feelings, and wholly subdued by his own, he stood for a moment irresolute whether or not he should advance. At length bursting into a violent flood of tears—by heavens this is too much ! cried he, and suddenly retreated as if unable to support this scene.

Lady Aubrey, as yet scarce capable of articulating, prevented his withdrawing by holding out her hand to him, which he kissed with the most moving tenderness ; and she fell into his arms in an agony of pathetic sorrow, which the most hardened and insensible could not have witnessed without being melted with compassion. Lord Belmont's whole soul seemed softened into pity, and he wept immoderately.

There is something peculiarly affecting in any violent expressions of grief in an old man: one is so little accustomed to behold them give way to the softer feelings, that when they burst the restraints of fortitude, it appears a sort of convulsion that is terrifying. Lady Aubrey, on perceiving the poignancy of his emotions, was instantly seized with an alarm which seemed to operate effectually in aiding her re-composure, or rather in inspiring her with resolution for struggling to attain it. She was for a moment calm—Oh my Lord! I am wounding, I am destroying you, cried she; but behold the all-powerful consolation I promised you—behold your children!

She disengaged herself from his embraces, and perhaps, Sophia, you will conclude that my sister and I instantly fell at our grandfather's feet and implored his blessing; but though this behaviour might have been more becoming,

coming, and perhaps in some people more natural, *my* feelings operated very differently. The tenderness of his manner to Lady Aubrey, and the benevolent expression diffused over his aged countenance, had at the first glance deprived him of the stern aspect with which my imagination had invested him, and a strong and obvious look of my dear father, which struck that moment at my heart with the force of an electrical shock, instead of throwing me on my knees conveyed me into his arms; where melted and subdued, had not sobs relieved me, I must have fainted away.

My sister followed my example the moment I had a little recovered myself. He embraced us both with infinite affection; and Lady Aubrey's tears flowed with a freedom and profusion that greatly relieved my apprehensions and her own sufferings.

Permit me to leave you for one half
L 5 hour,

hour, said Lord Belmont. I shall be enabled presently to behold my dear daughters with more composure, and their gentle hearts will be fortified by my absence. Is there not a son too, to whom I have still to be introduced. I will find Linrose, and desire him to present me to Mr. Howard.

I perceive they are just returned, cried Fanny, who had seen them from the windows; and my Lord left us with precipitation under pretence of going to join them.

The instant he was gone, the momentary composure which Lady Aubrey had laboured to maintain entirely forsook her, and the violence of her perturbation was succeeded by a weakness, languor, and depression, that seemed wholly to overpower her, and rendered me extremely apprehensive that this interview would be far from promoting the comfort and tranquillity of her mind. By
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the time that Lord Belmont returned, however, she was sedate and collected, yet both her health and looks have evidently suffered, though thank heaven not very materially, from this shock.

Eager to avoid any subject that might lead to mournful retrospections, Lord Belmont anxiously entered into conversation on matters less affecting, but equally interesting. He desired a particular account of our situation in all respects from our arrival in England to my sister's marriage, and expressed himself much pleased with Mr. Howard, to whom he had been introduced below. Both his expression and his manner were kind to excess; and he blamed himself severely for the part he had been induced to act. I must endeavour to atone to my children, said he, for my past behaviour in a way that I hope will banish it from their remembrance though the recollection ever must wound my own.

I could

I could have told him, had I been able to summon courage, that one word from his lips had already more than atoned for fifty times the uneasiness his rejection had occasioned; but I could only press his hand, as he held mine in his. I almost think he understood this silent token of gratitude, for he embraced me affectionately.

Lord Linrose and Mr. Howard having allowed a sufficient time for this explanatory conversation, then entered. The appearance of the former for the first few minutes overwhelmed me with confusion. I recollected the repugnance with which my grandfather had so long listened to his solicitations in my behalf, and recalled with pain the reluctant consent which Lady Aubrey's interference had extorted. My confidence however was soon restored by the extreme affection and condescension of Lord Belmont; who, as if he had penetrated into my thoughts
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and read my embarrassment, seemed to make me the object of his peculiar regard. He received, with infinite marks of satisfaction, all the little attentions which the pleasing idea of possessing a parent who claimed them excited from my sister and myself, was delighted with the information of our progress in different accomplishments, such as music, painting, &c. advantages which Lady Aubrey took care to display with all the exaggeration of maternal partiality, and when we were seating ourselves at table, ordered Lord Linrose to give him up the place of which he was about to take possession between Lady Aubrey and me. You begin to monopolize before your time, Sir, said he with a smile that covered me with blushes. He is indeed the most amiable old man I ever beheld, and must have been uncommonly handsome I think in his youth; though I will not deny but that an air of conscious dignity,

dignity, accompanied even with a look of austerity, is diffused over it, that may not at first sight prove prepossessing in the eyes of a stranger. But to his friends and to his children, he appears only what in fact he is, all condescension and benevolence. His resemblance to my father is so obvious, that he recalls him every instant to my remembrance, and you may recollect how much you used to admire the noble expression of *his* countenance.

Were his tenderness to my sister and myself wholly out of the question, his behaviour to Lady Aubrey would entirely gain my heart. Every look testifies the warmth of his admiration and respect; even the very tone of his voice on addressing her, is expressive of affection; and on her part, though the agitating scene of the morning seemed to have unhinged her nerves and wholly exhausted her strength and spirits, his
Lordship's

Lordship's tenderness appears to have recruited both. She is truly sensible of his goodness; and receives all his attentions with a mournful pleasure, which while it revives her sorrows, and encreases her melancholy, soothes and gratifies her heart.

Hurt by the idea of overclouding the happiness (which however combated by sympathy and compassion, Lord Belmont's arrival had universally diffused) she exerted herself yesterday evening to appear chearful; but the effort was apparent: she conversed on indifferent topics with seeming interest; but it was easy to divine that her thoughts were not present; and at last she insisted that I should sit down to the harpsichord and sing to my grandfather a little French air, which he had said he particularly admired. The first few notes however obliged her to leave the room, and I found it impossible to proceed.

This

This day, thank heaven, I think her spirits are less depressed. She had a long private conversation in the morning with Lord Belmont, chiefly in regard to our affairs, and seems to have been more relieved than affected by it. My Lord acknowledged to her every circumstance of the conduct of Lady Linrose, but requested that particular care might be taken not to encrease the resentment of her son by an open avowal of the ungenerous part she has secretly acted.

Her behaviour, said my Lord, has betrayed a degree of meanness, art, and duplicity, which convince me she is capable of any step, however irregular, from which she has hopes of attaining a favourite point. I shall myself therefore break off all connection with her in future; but I should be sorry to involve Linrose in a difference with his mother, and if our Hermione be as amiable as her lovely countenance bespeaks her, she

she will incline to soften rather than exasperate an indignation too justly excited. Oh Sophia! how proud and how pleased did this partial compliment from my grandfather make me.

Lady Aubrey assured him of my pacific disposition, and said she was certain I would be infinitely shocked with the apprehension of occasioning a rupture between them. I am convinced, added she, that her present happiness has already obliterated from her mind all resentment in regard to Lady Linrose; yet when she recalls the comfortless, unconnected situation in which she and her sister found themselves at the very moment that she so unfeelingly transmitted to them the account of your Lordship's determination, a determination which undoubtedly her own misrepresentations had effected, there is perhaps some little merit in dismissing indignation.

As an apology for the unkindness of
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my conduct, said my Lord, I must request you, my dear Madam, to peruse this letter, which I received from Lady Linrose in December last.

Lady Aubrey immediately read it; and afterwards repeated to us the contents as faithfully as her memory could retail them.

Lady Linrose began by informing Lord Belmont that she was about to acquaint him with an affair that had given her infinite vexation, and which she was afraid would involve his Lordship in much difficulty and uneasiness. She then tells him that his two granddaughters had taken the imprudent step (without any previous application or advice) of coming over to England; where they had lately arrived merely attended by a gentleman, who it was said was much devoted to them. After imprudently lodging all together in the house of a woman of very doubtful character, and associating

affociating almost solely with the famous Mrs. Weldon, with whom they had been intimate abroad, who was kept at present by a profligate young man of fortune, they had applied to her (Lady Linrose) as a relation from whom they expected countenance and civilities; and to this, her Ladyship adds, they would justly have been entitled, had not the glaring impropriety of their conduct rendered any attention on her part, on account of her daughters, wholly out of the question.

These were circumstances, she said, much to be regretted: but alas this unexpected journey to England had been attended by consequences still more disagreeable, and indeed truly alarming: her son Roatsley had accidentally seen and was become passionately enamoured of the eldest of these girls; though from a singular train of particulars, too tedious to retail, added to their having re-
tained

tained the name by which they had been hitherto known, he was still ignorant of the relationship that subsisted between them. Artful, beautiful, and designing, this young woman had spread every snare of coquetry and insinuation to captivate him, in which she had so entirely succeeded that he was blind to her imprudence, nor would listen to any attempts made by his friends to open his eyes.

She had no doubt, her Ladyship continued, but the ladies would soon prevail with Roasley to intercede with his Lordship in their favour, though as yet no explanation on that head seemed to have taken place between them; and added, that were it not for the unfortunate circumstance of his attachment, which absolutely required every possible check and discouragement, it would doubtless have been a natural and humane act to have endeavoured to restrain the

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the conduct of the girls within the bounds of propriety and decency; and to effect this desirable end, the notice and protection of their friends might have proved conducive: but at present she was convinced any favour or attentions afforded them would but give life to those romantic hopes which the dependent and unconnected obscurity of their situation had hitherto suppressed.

She then desires to have his Lordship's commands in what manner she should conduct herself on the occasion, to which she promises the most dutiful and implicit submission; and requests that his Lordship may not on any account allow her son to suspect that she had ever entered with him on this subject, as it could serve no purpose but that of producing endless quarrels and altercations between them, and he would be apt to *suspect her* (she adds) of having preposessed him against them. Her Ladyship,
after

after a great deal more to the same purpose, concludes with these words, which Lady Aubrey repeated verbatim, "the young ladies, I understand, intend addressing your Lordship in a letter, which I shall take particular care to dispatch the moment it is committed to my charge."

This letter, however, my Lord informed Lady Aubrey, never had arrived, though Lady Linrose in her next informed him that she had sent it off some days before. I was little solicitous, said his Lordship, about the fate of an epistle which the alarm I had received from the intelligence of my grandson's folly rendered me unwilling to peruse; but I doubt if it was ever intended for my sight, from the moment in which it reached the hands of that artful woman. At the time however no suspicion even entered my thoughts. Shocked at the danger which threatened all my favourite schemes for Linrose, I instantly desired
his

his mother by every means in her power to discourage his passion, and to prevent the slightest intercourse between her family and these imprudent girls, whose ill conduct, added to my grandson's infatuation, determined me to renounce them; and I ordered her to assure them that my resolution neither to behold nor acknowledge them was irrevocable. I made enquiry however in what situation they were in regard to fortune, and was pleased to find that their finances were in a situation that required not the interference of my assistance. Even this account, Linrose tells me, was false; for the unlucky failure of their guardian rendered their circumstances so uncomfortable that an application was made to him by one of their friends for some assistance, which I believe he intended to convey in the most delicate manner he could contrive under the borrowed form of a pension from government.

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On this head, said Lady Aubrey, I must exculpate Lady Linrose from blame; for the circumstance of Mr. Bensley's affairs I am convinced never came to her knowledge; and when she informed your Lordship that their situation required no aid, she was herself probably of that opinion. I must likewise observe, that though this account of their situation received from her pen all the exaggeration that art and prejudice could give it, yet it is possible that upon her first private enquiries in regard to them, she might have conceived a very unjust and unfavourable opinion of their behaviour. A variety of injurious rumours were the disagreeable consequence of their imprudence in lodging with a woman of whose character they were not particularly informed; and the unlucky intimacy which for a short time subsisted between them and Mrs. Weldon, owing to that abandoned woman's
having

art in getting admitted into very respectable society abroad, must have confirmed her error.

Yes, Madam, said Lord Belmont; but when she was herself undeceived, then, in honour, in justice, she was bound to have removed the disgust she had implanted: but instead of pursuing this path, the whole of her conduct discovers the most despicable and ungenerous artifice. In a late letter dated from Holtenham Abbey, she tells me that my grandchildren are behaving with greater propriety than could have been expected; that the youngest had lately married the gentleman who had attended them from the Continent, a circumstance she observes that *looked well*; and that her sister resided with them in that county, where they lived with credit. As they were but lately arrived and little known, nobody there she says seemed acquainted with their late levity of conduct. This

decorum, whether real or assumed merely for the purpose of deceiving Linrose, was extremely alarming, she adds, as they had acquired a reputation which youth and beauty, when attended with art, seldom found it difficult to obtain, where a favourite point was at stake. Thus, by working forcibly on my apprehensions in regard to my grandson, and representing my granddaughters in this unfavourable point of view, she evidently aimed at prepossessing me so strongly against them, as to render me on my return neither particular in my enquiries nor in any way solicitous about them: while at the same time, should at length the real truth transpire, she preserved the salvo of having been herself deceived.

To these accusations Lady Aubrey could have added the artful visit she made at Hubert Hill, and the feigned civilities and expressions of friendship by

by which she had endeavoured to gain our confidence and lull her son's suspicions, as affording her the means of separating us from Lord Belmont with greater facility and less danger of detection; but unwilling to exasperate where she was certain I would wish to reconcile, Lady Aubrey forbore acquainting him with this part of her behaviour.

She discovered however, in the course of this conversation, that Lord Linrose had partly hinted to him the approbation and admiration with which his mother had beheld us; but this having been followed by no particulars, and Lord Linrose having merely advanced that circumstance during the heat of their altercation as an argument in our favour, it had made no great impression on Lord Belmont's mind. I should be much distressed, Sophia, to be the means of occasioning divisions in a family with whom I am soon to be so intimately connected.

needed. I shall endeavour therefore as much as is possible to keep all aggravating additions from Lord Belmont's knowledge, as well as to persuade Lord Linrose into conciliating measures; who, though he is withheld from openly testifying his resentment, cannot talk of his mother's conduct with patience, even while he is ignorant of the extent of her artifice.

After this full and candid explanation, my Lord expressed in the strongest and most flattering terms his warm approbation of his grandson's choice, and spoke of me with a partial admiration that delighted the heart of our invaluable friend; and on being faithfully repeated to me, filled mine with gratitude and pleasure. Linrose, he said, was impatient to have matters concluded; and indeed, considering the happiness that awaited him, his eagerness was both natural and excusable; the ceremony therefore should

should be no longer delayed, than till the papers and settlements could be made out.

Having concluded this minute detail, I have one favour to request of my Hermione, added Lady Aubrey, and I flatter myself she will not refuse me. It is that you will not think of leaving this house, my love, till you have given your hand to Lord Linrose. Let me have the pleasure of thinking, that as under this roof you have experienced the most painful moments that hopeless love could send, under this roof your future happiness has been secured as far as the affection, gratitude, and admiration of a tender husband can secure it.

To this kind request you may believe I gave a grateful and willing assent, provided Lord Belmont approved of the proposal. I even entreated that she would endeavour if possible to prevail with him to agree to it; for I am ex-

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tremely

tremely apprehensive, from a hint he let drop this morning, that he has got the frightful intention of giving to this affair the air of a formal celebration, by inviting distant relations of the family, and introducing pomp and ceremonials where privacy with a very few friends is so much more suitable to the awful solemnity of the occasion. Lord Belmont, it is not difficult to perceive, is not easily moved by persuasion to alter a determined purpose; but heaven grant that in this instance, as in so many still more arduous, Lady Aubrey's unbounded influence may prevail.



AUGUST 8.

Lord Linrose and I, who contrive to steal a private walk every morning before breakfast, had a violent dispute during our early ramble to-day. He insisted

insisted that there was no necessity for waiting the tedious forms of law, since they could go on at leisure fully as well after as before the ceremony was performed; and to defer it till Dudley Mount was fitted up for our reception was, he said, the most useless and absurd formality, when so many kind friends were quarrelling who should have the first visit from us; and at all events we could take up our residence if we chose it at Alton Park with Lord Belmont.

I did not wish to appear affected: yet the prospect of an event that I had believed at the distance of some weeks, threw me into consternation; and the urgency with which my Lord laboured to reconcile me to this hasty scheme, convinced me he would easily contrive to surmount any obstacles that Lord Belmont might oppose to it.

I therefore entreated him to give over all thoughts of so precipitate a plan, and

to wait till every thing was quietly and properly adjusted. In the mean while I told him I should divide my time equally between Hubert Hill and Aubrey Castle; and as he must find himself equally at home at both those places, we might contrive to be constantly together.

My arguments were without effect. *He* continued to persuade and *I* to remonstrate. I think, at length cried he laughing, no plan remains for me but one, and that one is so natural on the present occasion, and must appear to all who hear of it so happy a termination to those endless difficulties and punctilios, that though you may not approve of the scheme I make no doubt time and contrition might prevail with you to forgive it: at least I may venture to hazard your displeasure in a cause that would so amply recompence me for the utmost severity of its effect. I shall have my carriage

carriage and servants in waiting to carry you off some morning when you are walking, and my grandfather's chaplain will have no scruples to deter him from performing a ceremony that is merely deferred from motives of absurd propriety.

He had scarce finished this sentence, when Lord Belmont suddenly joined us from the next walk. He smiled at my confusion; but kindly taking my hand, had you really attempted this wild scheme some weeks ago, Linrose, said he, I might have been *offended*; but I think, considering the temptation, I could not possibly have been *surprised*; however you may now summon a little patience to your aid, and a few weeks will adjust every thing to your satisfaction.

A few weeks, my Lord! exclaimed Lord Linrose. Your Lordship requires patience with a vengeance; but there is not the slightest chance that mine will hold out one third of the time.

M 5

I implored

I implored him by a look to defer the subject, but it was with evident difficulty and reluctance he obeyed me.

Well, Linrose, we shall see, cried Lord Belmont, and we soon after reached the house.

The family were just assembled at breakfast; and Lady Aubrey appeared in better looks and spirits than she has enjoyed since the receipt of Lord Belmont's letter. The company were all gaiety; and Lord Linrose having whispered to Mrs. Howard the circumstance of Lord Belmont having detected our morning tete a tete, she had the giddiness to say aloud that she understood an elopement was projected from Aubrey Castle, which she doubted not would soon take place unless Lord Belmont interfered to protect the injured honour of his family.

Yes, said my Lord, I must protect my daughter from the effects of an impetuosity, which I suspect will require all her gentleness

gentleness and good sense to keep within proper bounds; but I see no method so well calculated for promoting this end as the one I am convinced she will be apt on all occasions to adopt—that of *yielding the point*. You and I, my dear Madam, added he to Lady Aubrey, will discuss this matter afterwards.

The worst of all ways of *gaining a point*, cried Fanny, and a most abominable precedent for married women. I hope at least my sister won't think of introducing it at Hubert Hill.

Lord Belmont, with whom she is a great favourite, told her that he was convinced, as she had got the start of me in matrimony, I should in so acting merely follow the example set me by my youngest sister. I soon contrived to escape from this conversation, in which I found it impossible to join; and the moment I was gone, Lord Linrose earnestly entreated Lady Aubrey to endeavour to reconcile
me

me to a speedy celebration. The matter being then debated in full council, it was at length determined that our marriage should be concluded at Aubrey Castle; and that the day following the whole party should set off together for Hubert Hill, the vicinity of which situation to Dudley Mount rendered it a convenient residence for Lord Linrose as well as an agreeable one for all the others.

This being resolved, though without my having been consulted on the matter, Lord Linrose flew to find me in order to communicate this sudden change of measures. I was quietly seated in the library, though not very busy at my studies when he entered. My dearest Miss Seymour, cried he, a plan has been proposed and universally approved of, which I hope you will not be so inhuman as to oppose by any cold and fruitless objections. Lord Belmont, Lady Aubrey, and in short our whole friends, join in
opinion

opinion that the sooner my happiness is completed the better; and a thousand reasons, independent of my impatience, conspire to render it not merely proper but necessary. Lady Aubrey, whose maternal affection justly entitles her to every maternal privilege, with her usual unbounded goodness has condescended to name the very day of my happiness; and Wednesday next, my dearest Hermione, will behold me the most envied of mankind. Oh! generously tell me that you will not invent unnecessary delays—tell me that you hesitate no longer.

I did not affect a reluctance to oblige him: but agitated as I was, consented with that soothing satisfaction that ever attends our compliance to the entreaties of those we anxiously desire to please. The gratitude of Lord Linrose was as fervent as had been his urgency. But hearing some person on the stairs, I made
my

my escape to my own dressing room, where Lady Aubrey soon joined me.

She repeated to me the above information; and told me, that warmly experiencing the tender anxieties of a mother, she had ventured to assume the rights of that character in fixing the day, and may heaven, my Hermione, render every anniversary of Wednesday next more tranquil than that awful day can prove that unites us even to what our hearts hold most dear on earth, and if possible still more happy.

Oh! Sophia! in four days my fate will be determined. Mr. Price, the husband of our friend Miss Parsons, who I find was originally tutor to Lord Linrose and is particularly esteemed by him, has it seems long indulged the hopes of performing one day the sacred ceremony that must ascertain his pupil's happiness or misery in life; and a messenger has been actually dispatched to him, desiring
his

his attendance here on Wednesday. On this occasion Lady Aubrey willingly consented to Fanny's request that Mrs. Price should be invited to accompany her husband; and as I thought our little friend would be gratified with the compliment, I did not oppose it.

Adieu, my beloved friend! for the first and last time of my assuming the name, let me subscribe myself

your affectionate and sincere friend,

H. DUDLEY.



LETTER XXVI.

TO MISS BEAUMONT.

HUBERT HILL, AUG. 16.

ONCE more, my dearest Sophia, I write from Hubert Hill. This delightful

ful little abode, where, accompanied by the happy party from Aubrey Castle, I arrived on Friday forenoon.

Your Hermione, in presence of these dear and amiable friends, gave her hand to Lord Linrose on Wednesday last. No addition was made to the family on that occasion, Mr. and Mrs. Price excepted, from whom we parted on Thursday morning, as this little mansion could not have contained more visitors than at present are its inhabitants.

We were charmed to perceive the agreeable alteration which an easy mind and comfortable circumstances have produced in the looks of Mrs. Price. Her husband is a very amiable man; and her situation is in all respects as happy as it lately was the reverse. Mrs. Hindon, she told us, had received her, now her affairs no longer require her aid, with prodigious kindness, and had given her and Mr. Price an invitation to spend some weeks

weeks at her house; but though I shall always continue on good terms with my aunt, said she, I have had enough of her family, and shall not be in haste to accept her offer.

The formidable day, my Sophia, was passed in our usual way. Lady Aubrey, who always judges with peculiar good sense and propriety, would allow of no forms. Every thing went on as it had done on the preceding day, excepting that the servants and tenants had a ball and plentiful dinner provided for them in the hall; but as there was no necessity for my making my appearance, I merely partook of their mirth from hearing the distant sound of the fiddles from below.

A licence having been procured, Mr. Price performed the ceremony; after which we sat down as usual to our customary employments, and cards and backgammon divided the evening. Lady Aubrey's agitation during the service almost

almost equalled mine; but thank heaven her spirits of late have been chearful and composed, and I trust every succeeding day will bring her additional comfort and satisfaction.

The company of Lady Linrose, on this occasion, you may suppose was neither expected nor desired. Lord Linrose had in a cold letter informed her of the event a few days before it took place; but the presence of Lord Belmont, who had written her in a very decisive manner that they must meet no more, afforded an easy pretext for not requesting that of her Ladyship. All the notice Lord Linrose took of this rupture was, to tell her that as his grandfather appeared offended by some private particulars of her Ladyship's conduct, it was not in his power to solicit the honour of a visit from her on the occasion of an event which a multiplicity of misrepresentations

representations and mistakes has unhappily too long deferred.

On the evening of the day on which we got hither we all walked out, to shew Lord Belmont the beauties of this charming place; and oh! Sophia! what an altered aspect every object wore, from the languor that so lately invested them. Lord Linrose led the way to the spot by the side of the river, once the scene of so much confusion and perplexity to me, when he stole upon me unperceived and first made the discovery of my affections. He had the delicacy however to make no other observation on the occasion than to talk of the romantic beauty of the situation with an enthusiastic admiration that evidently bespoke some secret source of partiality. His looks however were sufficiently expressive; and he pressed the hand that leaned on his arm with all the fervour of gratitude. Pray, cried he smiling, what is become of the pretty
little

little child that used to pay you frequent visits here.

I could not recall the teizing curiosity of Charlotte's behaviour without laughing heartily from that pleased sensation with which one recollects past vexations, now converted into enjoyment by the present happy reverse; and I related to my Lord, as we walked, the additional anguish which the little girl's persecution had given me during his mother's visit. Oh! with what gratitude did I raise my heart to heaven for the innumerable blessings that furrounded me.

As it grew late, Lord Belmont, who dreaded the damps of the evening, persuaded Lady Aubrey to return with him to the house, and Mr. and Mrs. Howard attended them: but my Lord and I prolonged our walk for a full hour longer. Every object around afforded some interesting subject for retracing past uneasiness and for contemplating with delighted

lighted thankfulness the present happy contrast. Every interview between us was remembered, every conversation where prudence on the one side and timidity on the other presided, was annalized and investigated, and the secret motives of every action acknowledged.

When at length we returned to the house, we found cards of congratulation from Lady Mary Lawrence and Lady Elizabeth; and this morning I have received a letter from Lady Linrose herself, who sends me her felicitations with all the ease of a person who is unconscious of ever having intended to injure me. Lord Linrose coloured with indignation on perusing it. This is effrontery with a vengeance, said he: but the approach of Lord Belmont sealed his lips.

I have answered her with polite reserve. She expects, she says, to be favoured with a visit from her son and his *amiable bride*, as soon as the parade
of

of receiving visits is at an end; but I fear it will not be in my power to persuade Lord Linrose to condescend to this, at least for some time; and I have told her that as we have escaped for the present the disagreeable ceremonials she mentions, by taking up our residence with my brother and sister, we must devote some weeks to these duties when Dudley Mount becomes our residence, for which reason it is not in our power to fix any determined period for waiting upon her Ladyship. I have desired to be particularly remembered to the sweet Lucy; and indeed I promise myself much pleasure from cultivating her friendship. Her brother is passionately attached to her; and means if possible to prevail with her to join our family, as the unaccountable preference given by Lady Linrose to Miss Dudley renders home extremely unpleasant, and his
mother,

mother, he says, he is convinced will have no objection to part with her.

Lord Belmont, whose affection towards my sister and me seems hourly to encrease, has presented Fanny with ten thousand pounds. This comfortable addition to Mr. Howard's fortune gives them every thing they desire to possess; for now that Lord Linrose and I are about to settle within four miles of them, Fanny has not a wish beyond the limits of the county, and her husband's taste leads him wholly to the enjoyment of a country life. His Lordship's settlements upon his grandson and me are noble; but as I am very little solicitous about these matters, I shall wave particulars. My Lord, who is fond of rural sports, intends that we shall spend great part of the year at Dudley Mount; a resolution which gives me infinite pleasure. He is sick of the frivolous amusements of London, and I have no pleasure in them.

I now

I now possess all my heart can wish, and happy in the society of those I sincerely and fervently love, I wish not to enlarge my circle beyond what politeness and propriety demand.

Adieu!

H. LINROSE.

P. S. I have this instant received your letter. I imagined my happy situation would not easily admit of augmentation; but the hopes of so soon embracing and presenting my beloved Sophia to my dear Lord Linrose has overwhelmed me with additional gratitude and delight. Hasten, my Sophia, hasten to your impatient friend.

[F I N I S]



Wish me you are too
happy for words.